



# BALCONES

*A Crossroads of San Antonio*

# HEIGHTS

*by Lewis F. Fisher*

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**"LET'S TALK SAN ANTONIO"**



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# Contents

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|   |    |
|---|----|
| 1. Homesites in the Hills                   | 1  |
| 2. The Incorporation "War" with San Antonio | 7  |
| 3. Hard Times in a Tax-Free City            | 17 |
| 4. The World Rushes In                      | 27 |
| 5. New Realities                            | 35 |
| 6. Balcones Heights at 50                   | 45 |
| City Councils since 1949                    | 51 |
| Notes                                       | 53 |
| Index                                       | 56 |

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At Last It Has Been Made Possible  
A Homesite in the Hills at a Price Within Reach of All

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## "LET'S TALK SAN ANTONIO"

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# 1. Homesites in the Hills

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Warring tribes such as that of this Comanche chieftain ranged the open lands outside San Antonio well into the nineteenth century, limiting development of Balcones Heights and other areas.

As Spanish explorer Bernardo de Miranda y Flores left San Antonio for the Hill Country in 1756, the stair-stepped line of hills he encountered seemed to him a rising series of balconies. He named the escarpment, which separates the grassy plain from wooded uplands, *Los Balcones*.<sup>1</sup>

Nearly two centuries later, when homebuilders set their sights on a southern crest of the escarpment, the name for the subdivision was obvious—Balcones Heights.

Even before Miranda y Flores made his journey, the future location of Balcones Heights was tied to San Antonio. The path of Hillcrest Road, which forms the northern boundary of Balcones Heights, also was the northern boundary of the royal land grant in 1733 from the King of Spain to settlers from the Canary Islands.

Spanish travelers through the area followed a trail parallel to the future route of the Southern Pacific Railroad east of Balcones Heights. By the time of the Republic of Texas, however, stagecoach transportation required a higher, straighter route. In the 1840s Fredericksburg Road was surveyed just to the west along its present course through Balcones Heights.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to being a stagecoach route, Fredericksburg Road became a major military roadway when the U.S. Army's Camp Verde was established in southern Kerr County in 1855. It provided a route for camels headquartered there in a transportation experiment before the Civil War. From 1908 until after World War I, Fredericksburg Road echoed with the cadence of troops marching from Fort Sam Houston out to the Leon Springs Military Reservation and camps Stanley and Bullis.

Hostile Indians delayed the countryside's settlement well into the nineteenth century. As late as 1914 Ellen Maury Slayden, wife of Congressman James L. Slayden, described awakening at dawn at the Albert Mavericks' Sunshine Ranch, which overlapped the future Balcones Heights on the west, "to new joy in the wide-spreading valley, the wastes of green mesquite and yellow stubble, and the distant town half drowned in purple mist, the few high buildings very white and stately, suggesting Venice."<sup>3</sup>

In the wake of Indians, Spaniards and soldiers came the automobile, and the brushy ranchlands of Fredericksburg Road were changed forever.

Early automobiles could not deal with the nation's narrow cross-country dirt roads, which rains made impassable and the





In the 1840s Fredericksburg Road was surveyed through what would become Balcones Heights as a major stagecoach route for mail and passengers.

sun dried into rutted canyons. With no federal agencies to call on, private associations formed to build hard-surfaced roads. Funds came locally through chambers of commerce and nationally from the automobile and road-building industries. One association funded the Lincoln Highway from Boston to San Francisco, another the Jefferson Highway from Winnipeg to New Orleans.

In 1919, a group called the Old Spanish Trail Association set up headquarters in San Antonio to plan the first transcontinental highway across the southern United States, from San Diego, California, to St. Augustine, Florida. The route approached San Antonio from the northwest down Fredericksburg Road, its two lanes paved with concrete through "the wastes of green mesquite and yellow stubble."<sup>4</sup>

To celebrate the opening of the Old Spanish Trail Highway, on March 23, 1929, a motorcade of nine "machines" left San Diego headed east. Two soon broke down. But five days later the remaining seven made it down Fredericksburg Road through the future Balcones Heights. A mile to the south, at the Babcock Road intersection, a welcoming party and motorcycle escort joined them for the drive into San Antonio. The motorcade passed through again seven months later on the return trip from St. Augustine.<sup>5</sup>

By this time, the automobile's mobility was helping San Antonio, then the largest city in the largest state, spread rapidly in all directions—especially toward the hills to the northwest. There, off Fredericksburg Road at the edge of city limits, the Spanish theme was being tapped by such subdivisions as Spanish Acres and Jefferson Manor in Woodlawn Hills. Their signature Spanish Colonial Revival design was picked up for the magnificent Jefferson High School, completed in 1932. Its baroque ornamentation, domed towers and landscaped courtyards became a magnet for families seeking a prestigious address among shaded homes, green lawns, spacious schools and quiet streets.

Ever-optimistic developers saw opportunity even in the darkening economic clouds approaching San Antonio from the east, where stock markets had collapsed in 1929.

If people had started hoarding money due to economic fears and construction costs were down due to less building, then the Jefferson Manor Company had the solution. "Now is really the time to build a home," its sales manager declared. Lots west of the nearly completed high school went on the market in November 1931. Fifty-foot-wide homesites were priced from \$675 to \$975, "Some More—A Few Less."<sup>6</sup>

Other developers sensed an untapped market niche among families unable to afford those prices but still yearning for upward social and geographic mobility. Four months later, on March 27, 1932, developer L. J. Hart's new Balcones Heights Company offered an alternative to the glitzy development around Jefferson High School.

"At Last It Has Been Made Possible," trumpeted advertising of the Modern Development Company, the Balcones Heights Company's sales arm: "A Homesite in the Hills at a Price Within



Fredericksburg Road through the future Balcones Heights was a frequent route for soldiers marching from Fort Sam Houston out to maneuvers at camps Stanley and Bullis.

Reach of All—Balcones Heights." The city's "Newest Big Development" was 40 acres of a 117-acre tract bounded by Fredericksburg, Balcones Heights, Babcock and Hillcrest roads, one mile northwest of Jefferson High School. One selling point was that the Ursuline Academy planned to move from its historic downtown buildings to the corner of Fredericksburg and Balcones Heights roads, a move that ultimately did not occur.

Balcones Heights lots were priced far below those around Jefferson High School—at \$250 to \$600, "Fredericksburg Road Business Corners Slightly Higher." No matter that prospective buyers arrived to find lots only half as wide as the Jefferson area's 50-foot homesites. Buy two adjoining lots and you still paid less.<sup>7</sup>

Too, Balcones Heights was outside city limits and had fewer restrictions. Here you could "build your bungalow of moderate cost and yet be assured of no 'shacks,' " still be within walking distance of Jefferson High School, have shade trees and "command a beautiful view," at least on "practically every lot."<sup>8</sup>

Summed up the sales company's president, J. G. Head: "We are making it possible for the person with moderate means to own a homesite in the hills overlooking the city."<sup>9</sup>

Developers bused prospects out to Balcones Heights. At the end of the first week they reported sales of 72 homesites, adding that 60 percent were purchased by "persons from out of the city." At the end of one month, reported sales approached the 200 mark. Names of buyers were not revealed. Nor was it told how





The magnificent Jefferson High School, opened in 1931, was a magnet for homesite buyers and triggered the first subdivision in nearby Balcones Heights. But as this view indicates, actual building around Jefferson was slow during the Depression, delaying spread of new homes to Balcones Heights until after World War II.



many sales were multiple lots to single buyers, nor how many purchasers were individual homeowners actually planning to build and not speculators intending to resell the land.<sup>10</sup>

J. G. Head, who said his Balcones Heights sales force numbered 50 men and women, did state that lots were "being offered at the smallest margin on which his concern had ever worked." He expected "the volume of sales to make up for the small margin of profit."<sup>11</sup>

By now, promoters did not lack imagination in countering Depression fears. In March, the Jefferson Manor Company sought to draw prospects from the Balcones Heights grand opening by throwing a citywide Easter egg hunt next to the new high school. To keep prospects coming to Balcones Heights, on Sunday, May 1, its developers offered free pocketbooks containing from 5 cents to \$50 to the first 250 cars driving out.

Not to be outdone, Jefferson Manor promoters the next Sunday promised "Free Ice Cream For Everybody." Jefferson Manor also offered low terms of \$3 down and \$3 per week, with no interest or taxes for one year—an important concession, since the San Antonio School District had just announced that 60 percent of its anticipated tax revenues were probably uncollectible and taxes had to be raised to cover the difference.<sup>12</sup>

Although slow to reach San Antonio, the Great Depression, alas, was now striking with full force. Deep citywide cuts in employment and revenues plus such associated disasters as bank failures were not abating. Both the city and its school district announced major cutbacks.

It was now painfully apparent that not Easter eggs nor free cash nor ice cream would turn beleaguered homeseekers into buyers anytime soon. Optimistic sales pitches for Jefferson and Balcones Heights developments and those elsewhere abruptly stopped.<sup>13</sup>

The onset of World War II spurred economic recovery. But for wistful prospective homeowners there was little relief. Building permits for new housing were strictly limited to quotas supporting the war effort. Materials to extend utilities and streets were diverted to the same purpose—which was just as well since gasoline for cars that would drive to the distant new homes was severely rationed.

By 1943, national surveys estimated that postwar demand for homes would exceed four million, and that within six months after the end of the war at least one million families would build or buy new homes.<sup>14</sup>

In May 1943, new blocks north of the original Balcones Heights subdivision were surveyed as Country Gentleman Estates by developer Frank W. Wick, who sat back and waited for the war to end.



This pastoral scene, looking west, was unrecognizable scarcely a decade after this photo was taken in 1947. Loop 410 was built across Fredericksburg Road in the foreground, with Green Pastures Restaurant becoming the site of Citizens Frost Bank at the new intersection's northwest corner. Hillcrest Road, angling into view at the left, became the northwestern boundary of Balcones Heights. The new home of soon-to-be-mayor Clyde Crews is visible down the road to its left.

## 2. The Incorporation 'War' with San Antonio

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For a moment in time, at the end of World War II, the Balcones Heights area was a middle ground for residents of the ranch country to the north and those of the city to the south. Its few buildings included a rock wellhouse built to supply water to the still empty homesites hawked to absentee buyers a decade before.

Along the future northeast boundary of Balcones Heights was the Storey-Wood Arena with its low wooden grandstand. From 1946 to 1952, when it was superseded by events at the new Freeman Coliseum, a three-night rodeo each summer drew city dwellers up to watch competing cowboys from the outlands.<sup>1</sup>

*Residents' need for zoning regulations led to the forming of Balcones Heights.*

A mile away, out Fredericksburg Road nearly to Callaghan Road, the country place of onetime San Antonio Postmaster John J. Stevens was being transformed by five partners, among them inventor, oilman and Southwest Research Institute founder Tom Slick and a young Dallas native named Clyde C. Crews. It was to be a showplace for San Antonians to view crossbreed cattle from distant ranches.

But instead of a cattle showplace, the old home and new quonset hut/showbarn were opened by Crews in May 1947 as a Western-style restaurant called Green Pastures. On part of the six nearby acres he bought from Frank Wick, Crews built the first home in Country Gentleman Estates.

"I sold some of my land to others, with deed restrictions requiring new construction to cost a minimum amount," Crews later recalled. "But thanks to inflation, one buyer who said he was going to build a garage apartment instead spent the same amount to build a small two-story house that didn't fit the neighborhood. I knew we had to get some zoning regulations very quickly."<sup>2</sup>

Zoning, however, was not done in unincorporated areas of Bexar County. Even if Crews's neighborhood were annexed by San Antonio, the likelihood of getting prompt zoning action was slim, given the municipal inattention to San Antonio's newly annexed territories. The solution, as Crews and some of his new neighbors saw it: form a separate, incorporated city.

Considering San Antonio politics at the time, it was a highly volatile notion.

The sudden incorporation of Balcones Heights sparked a free-for-all. Charges and counter charges flew as San Antonio City

"real city government" and should, with their prime residential tax base, be made part of San Antonio as well.<sup>5</sup>

San Antonio lost those suits. But even as tax revenue poured in from new areas, San Antonio city government was falling short in expanding water and sewage services and fire and police protection. Early in 1947, some 75 irate residents of one area in the Harlandale school district to the south, long notified of their impending annexation and of city services to follow, got tired of waiting. They revolted and held an election to incorporate as the City of Terrell Wells. A year later the matter was winding its way to the Texas Supreme Court.<sup>6</sup>

The lesson of Terrell Wells, ultimately unsuccessful in its quest for independence, was not lost on residents moving into the fast-growing Balcones Heights community, boosted by its developers—in the mode of suburban developments mushrooming nationwide—as a tranquil haven free of urban hassles.

In Frank Wick's carefully named Country Gentleman Estates, Lady Street and Gentleman Street were joined by such "drives" as Pleasant, Leisure and Happy, all as yet unpaved. Wick sold residents water from his own well on Lady Street, later renamed Crestview Drive. In the original Balcones Heights subdivision to the south, each 25-foot frontage sold by John Novak gained for its owner one share in the Balcones Heights Water Company, served by the wellhouse at Altgelt Avenue and Gentleman Street.

Throughout Balcones Heights, sewer service was on your own—septic tanks fitted nicely beneath the lawns—and butane gas was delivered in small tanks, in lieu of gas mains.

If San Antonio unilaterally annexed Balcones Heights, would there be sufficient zoning laws or gas or sewer lines—or any other useful services anytime soon—to compensate for the new tax bills? Few bet on it. Moreover, the area had more than 70 homes and more than the minimum 200 residents required for a separate corporate identity. Led by Clyde Crews, Ivan Maddox, Carl Kiefer and Samuel Mershon, residents meeting in Maddox's mattress factory—later Grady's Bar-B-Q—on Fredericksburg Road decided to incorporate before San Antonio got to them first.<sup>7</sup>

A surveyor, Reynolds Andricks, was hired to come up with boundaries for the city. Rather than taking in a vast open expanse into which the city could grow, he outlined a wedge-shaped area of approximately one square mile based on where people were actually living. Borders were defined by existing roads with one exception, the open land past the point where Hillcrest Road ended at Fredericksburg Road.

"I was standing there with Andricks," Crews recalled, "and he just projected an imaginary line to the northeast out to the Storey-Wood Arena."<sup>8</sup> The arena fell just outside the new city limits, as the border cut east, then south to encompass Henry Hannasch's Hillside Tourist Court and Mobile Home Park, set up in 1942.

The vote occurred on Saturday, November 13, 1948, at Jack Casper's Light House Courts at 4120 Fredericksburg Road. By the time polls closed that night, 35 of the 38 voters had approved in-

*In 1948, Balcones Heights residents decided to incorporate before San Antonio tried to annex them first.*



# S. A. WARS ON BALCONES HEIGHTS

## S.A. Declares War on New Suburb

The City of San Antonio Thursday declared war on its infant neighbor on Fredericksburg rd., Balcones Heights.

In a unanimous action, city council voted to order all city services withheld from the suburb and ordered city utilities make no new connections in the 3-square-mile town.

The resolution passed by council specifically prohibits service to the suburb by fire and police departments, sanitation department, garbage department and the city engineer.

### NO OTHERS HIT

The move ordered by council apparently will not affect other suburban towns.

Commissioner Raymond South announced he would continue to supply fire department service to the towns of Olmos Park and Terrell Hills.

In fact he indicated the resolution might not stand in the way of his department's making calls in Balcones Heights. He explained:

"We've never failed to act in an emergency."

### PRESENT SERVICES

Only services provided the town at present are water, gas and electricity.

The order will have the effect, observers said, of preventing any further connections of these utilities and prevent the town from obtaining sewage disposal service from the city in the future.

Balcones Heights was incorporated in an election Saturday which carried 35 to 3. There are some 200 persons living in the town.

The resolution passed by the city council says Balcones Heights may derive certain benefits from its proximity to San Antonio. It continues, stating the material resources of San Antonio are limited and should be used for the city's own purposes.

### NO FACILITIES

The resolution then directs that none of the facilities and services of the city shall be supplied the new town. Observers said they did not believe this order was intended to affect existing utility services.

The order further directs no further extensions be made by public service board, water board, sanitation department, garbage department, city engineer and police and fire department.



corporation.<sup>9</sup> Once results were canvassed by county commissioners, a city government could be formed. Casper was hired as the first constable, patrolling at first in his own car.

"When the city gives us, or definitely promises us, gas and sewers," reported one organizer, "most of us would vote to come into San Antonio."<sup>10</sup>

In spite of such an assurance, Mauerman's successor, San Antonio Mayor Alfred Callaghan, caught off guard by the election, reacted swiftly. On Monday he ordered the city's legal department to draft an ordinance prohibiting extension of any utilities to Balcones Heights if its residents went any further, despite the fact that San Antonio utilities were already serving Terrell Hills and Olmos Park.

Declared Callaghan of the new suburb: "I do not propose to have another of these attaching itself to the City of San Antonio if I can help it," especially when, he emphasized the next day, many areas already within San Antonio still lacked utility service.<sup>11</sup>

San Antonio councilmen fell in line three days later when they voted unanimously to request city agencies to withhold services from Balcones Heights and to make no new connections there. Fire Commissioner Raymond South hedged on whether his department would refuse to make calls by noting "We've never failed to act in an emergency," but the City Public Service Board agreed to go along with the council until it could decide on a firm policy.<sup>12</sup>

On a front page including the banner "S.A. Wars on Balcones Heights," a *San Antonio Light* story was headlined "S.A. Declares War on New Suburb."

Balcones Heights incorporation activist Jack Casper seemed to express residents' feelings by snapping to a reporter, "Cut off the utilities? Let 'em. All we have out here is electricity. I've got my own butane, my own septic tank and I just paid \$3,200 for a new water system."<sup>13</sup>

By the time Bexar County commissioners verified election results and gave the new town the green light on December 6, it was obvious that the siege would be a long one.

On February 19, 1949, the embattled new Balcones Heights council, headed by Mayor Clyde Crews, 32, held its first meeting. Within two months the much-sought zoning ordinance was ready. It upgraded the minimum size of building lots from the 25 feet of 1932 to 75 feet and strictly limited mobile home courts, a provision that quickly caused the city's first zoning altercation, over construction of a "trailer camp" at 4209 Fredericksburg Road.<sup>14</sup>

After posting more new ordinances in three designated public places—Page's Service Station, Woldhagen's Builder's Supply and





## BALCONES HEIGHTS

CITY LIMIT  
POP. 324



Balcones Heights Mayor Clyde C. Crews  
at a Fredericksburg Road entrance to  
the embattled year-old city in 1949.

Pape's Food Store—in June 1949 the new city set up a corporation court and adopted health, police and fire regulations.

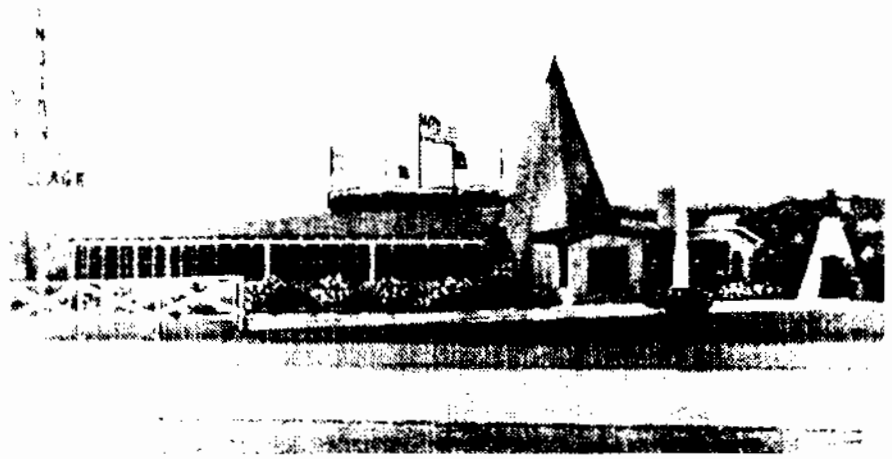
This took place in the new permanent meeting place for the council and the new court—the rock wellhouse at Gentleman Street and Altgelt Avenue, cleaned up for the additional use when developer John Novak turned the building and the water system over to an association of its users.

Council meetings previously were held in members' homes or on Fredericksburg Road at the Tee Pee Indian Village Restaurant or the mayor's Green Pastures Restaurant. But Green Pastures was a quarter-mile beyond city limits. After opponents of the city's incorporation charged that this made the deliberations there illegal, an ordinance was passed ratifying all actions taken in meetings outside Balcones Heights.<sup>15</sup>

When Novak turned over his wellhouse and water system he also donated to Balcones Heights its first park, a triangular tract along Balcones Heights Road. Early in 1950 the grateful city named it Cillie Novak Park in honor of the developer's wife.<sup>16</sup>

Nevertheless, after a year of independence, other amenities along the idyllically named streets were sorely lacking. True, the number of homes had doubled to 150 and population was up to nearly 370. There were 15 businesses, the newest being Siesta Motor Court midway down Fredericksburg Road, where R. L. Lindsey had to clear off mesquite trees and kill rattlesnakes to make way for the tile-roofed units surrounding the latest tourist court innovation in highway hospitality: a private swimming

*napped back one resident:  
Cut off the utilities? Let  
em. All we have out here is  
electricity."*



One early gathering place for Balcones Heights residents was the Tee Pee Indian Village Restaurant at 4535 Fredericksburg Road.

But San Antonio steadfastly denied Balcones Heights all utilities except electricity, though the city still provided them to other suburbs. Without taxes, Balcones Heights revenues came only from building permits, fees, licenses, a few court cases and donations. At the end of 1949 the city treasury stood at \$500. That was not enough to repair the streets, much less pave them.<sup>18</sup>

So Balcones Heights came up with a sort of Depression-era public works program all its own.

In the fall of 1949, the council adopted an ordinance requiring all male inhabitants between the ages of 21 and 45, "except ministers of the gospel actually engaged in the discharge of their duties," to spend a total of five days each year—from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., with one hour for lunch—working on public streets and alleys. Exemptions could be purchased at one dollar per day. Those not showing up or paying the assessment would be guilty of a misdemeanor and liable for a fine of up to \$100 per day. Each day was considered a separate offense.<sup>19</sup>

A group of Altgelt Avenue residents in the summer of 1951 proposed collecting 50 cents per foot of street frontage to cover the cost of paving their street and made an advance deposit.

Other residents got a bonus when the San Antonio City Water Board began building a water tank for the adjacent Dellview subdivision without realizing the tank site was in Balcones Heights. Faced with having to take the tank down and rebuild it elsewhere, the Water Board chose the alternative offered by the Balcones Heights council and provided water to surrounding Balcones Heights residents once the tank was finished.<sup>20</sup>

While the bloom was wearing off the rose of incorporation for some, warmer winds were blowing from San Antonio once its suburb-baiting mayor was swept out of office by a reform ticket. That made it easier, in the fall of 1952, for beleaguered Balcones Heights Mayor Carl Kiefer to outline the city's perilous situation to a meeting of nearly 100 residents. Each got a chance to express an opinion on whether enough was enough. After three hours, one-third favored continuing as a separate city, one-third favored annexation by San Antonio and one-third was undecided.<sup>21</sup>

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*In 1949, all males aged 21 to 45 were required to spend five days a year working on public streets—except for "ministers of the gospel actually engaged in the discharge of their duties."*

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Built as a wellhouse for homes in the first Balcones Heights subdivision, this building became the Balcones Heights city hall in mid-1949. Meetings had to be interrupted to turn on the pump and send water into the tank, which stood past the far end of the building.

Kiefer felt the inconclusive results justified exploring the possibility of surrender with San Antonio's new city manager, Charles A. Harrell. Councilman Clyde Crews, the former mayor, met with San Antonio reformer Walter W. McAllister and secured a promise that if Balcones Heights allowed itself to be annexed, taxes would not exceed the amount Balcones Heights residents were currently paying for school taxes.<sup>22</sup>

Four months later, on February 2, 1953, residents met in the city hall/wellhouse to hear Mayor Kiefer's report.

It was a "boisterous" meeting, newspapers reported the next day. Some 200 residents showed up, overflowing the old building. The city's makeshift nature was brought home as the meeting, nearly four hours long, was interrupted five times so an engineer could run the pump to resupply the strained water system.

Mayor Kiefer opened by reading a letter from Harrell. Should Balcones Heights agree to be annexed, the San Antonio city manager wrote, there would be immediate fire and police protection, garbage collection, street maintenance and park service. Bus service and street lights might be added, and sewer connections, too, depending on results of an upcoming bond issue. In return, Balcones Heights homeowners would pay taxes equivalent to \$112.50 on a \$5,000 home.

Kiefer made no recommendation to the audience but indicated he favored annexation, as did Councilman Crews—who said Balcones Heights could not be run on nothing—and Ralph Hindelang, who calculated that even 100 percent of the maximum legal tax levy would be insufficient for Balcones Heights to operate on its own.



The northeast corner of Balcones Heights was extended to include Henry Hannasch's tourist courts, shown looking east in 1948. Dewhurst Road doglegs at right as Beryl Road angles from lower left. Above the mobile homes at left is the fenced Storey-Wood Arena, to its right the dairy barns of George Delavan, whose fields at right became San Antonio's Dellview subdivision. Hannasch soon razed the courts for his own subdivision.

Two of the other three councilmen, Neil Ferry and J. D. Kalafat, favored continued incorporation. So did an apparent majority of those present, who scorned the chance of San Antonio providing timely services while acknowledging that some sort of taxation needed to be implemented by Balcones Heights quite soon.

Then, in a subplot, residents split north and south over water.

Regardless of whether or not Balcones Heights dissolved itself, San Antonio's new mood was still to give a hand to users of the obviously inadequate water system in southern Balcones Heights and allow them to connect to San Antonio water.

This news brought cries from northern residents, who insisted their privately operated Country Gentleman Estates system also be included. San Antonio's City Water Board would not agree to that, thought Balcones Heights City Attorney W. W. Folkes. Finally, councilmen passed a compromise measure, permitting connection of the southern system while seeking addition of the northern system.<sup>23</sup>

The next week councilmen accepted the assets of the Balcones Heights Water Association in preparation for turning the system over to San Antonio. Then they appointed a committee to come up with some sort of tax plan to finance municipal operations.<sup>24</sup>

The four-year-old City of Balcones Heights would stay the course.





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## 3. Hard Times in a Tax-Free City

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An official committee might be studying a tax plan, but a vocal group of Balcones Heights residents was going to have nothing of it.

The tax issue erupted as the focal point of a ferocious election campaign in 1956. The Citizens' Ticket of mayoral candidate Clarence A. Jones and four others variously disaffected by strong-willed Mayor Franklin S. Gaskins and his administration sought to throw out the incumbents by vowing there would never be taxes in Balcones Heights. More than two-thirds of the voters turned out—214 of an eligible 300—and all incumbents were returned to office, Gaskins leading his slate by a margin of 64 percent.<sup>1</sup>

Despite that mandate, the council kept taxation on hold while running the growing city on a hand-to-mouth basis. Utility problems were dealt with, fire protection was addressed and the law was enforced, even if Balcones Heights had to endure being pilloried as a speed trap. Adequate street maintenance was the biggest puzzle. But residents held on, hoping that somewhere down the road there would come a break that would make the burdens bearable.

And eventually, there did.

Eight years after Balcones Heights incorporated with some 300 residents in 75 homes, its population had quadrupled to 1,224 persons in 347 dwellings. A dozen more were under construction. Apartment construction began with zoning approval for duplexes and designation of a zone for multi family units east of Gentleman Drive between Hillcrest and Glenarm drives in 1953. Old landmarks passed. Green Pastures Restaurant burned in mid-1951 and the Storey-Wood Arena closed the next year, a victim of the popularity of rodeos at the new Freeman Coliseum east of San Antonio.<sup>2</sup>

As new San Antonio subdivisions swept up to and past Balcones Heights city limits, they would be served in part by two churches and a school at the northeastern corner of Balcones Heights. In 1953, as Henry Hannasch cleared away his tourist courts for a subdivision, he donated a site on Dewhurst Road for St. Gregory the Great Catholic Church and School. Sponsored by St. Mary Magdalene Catholic Church to the southeast, its first pastor was Father Michael J. Holdman.

*Facing Page:* Balcones Heights Police Chief Bob Pryor, described by one newspaper columnist as "the fellow who hands out most traffic tickets," in 1958 with the 11-jewel "Speed Watch," which measured traffic speeds accurately to within one-hundredth of a second.



By 1955, Balcones Heights had been met by the suburban growth of San Antonio, its downtown skyline barely visible on the right horizon. This view looking southeast shows San Antonio's Dellview subdivision, its western edge on land deannexed by Balcones Heights in return for paving of Balcones Heights streets by developers.

In 1957 the Unitarian-Universalist Association began planning a church a few blocks to the west. Another church was born in Balcones Heights the same year, when the congregation of Hope Lutheran Church, which located permanently on Callaghan Road outside the city, held its organizational meeting in the Indian Village Restaurant on Fredericksburg Road.<sup>3</sup>

Residents of southern Balcones Heights had been enjoying dependable water from San Antonio mains since their system was donated to Balcones Heights and turned over to San Antonio in 1953. But northern residents continued to complain about low pressure and high rates from the still independent Country Gentleman Estates system.

San Antonio sewer connections came in 1957, two years after Mayor Gaskins made front-page headlines for being charged with assault by a San Antonio city plumbing inspector looking for illegal connections to sewer lines that ran through Balcones Heights. Charges were later dismissed.<sup>4</sup>

After its initial posturing about denying fire department services to Balcones Heights, San Antonio provided the new suburb with fire protection on a fee basis. When the fee was raised, rather than renewing the agreement, Balcones Heights relied on Bexar County fire protection until the county reported, in the fall of 1954, that under state law it was not required to serve municipalities on an ongoing basis. Thus on November 12, Balcones Heights,



Mayor Frank Gaskins, left, and John Caran inspect the Balcones Heights Volunteer Fire Department's first truck, a 300-gallon Army surplus pumper purchased in 1954.

under the leadership of John Caran, organized its own 25-member volunteer fire department, many of them Kelly Air Force Base firefighters who lived nearby.<sup>5</sup> Fund-raising and public donations financed a concrete-block building for the fire department at 107 Glenarm Place in 1955.

At Kelly the city found a surplus 300-gallon pumper, which it bought for \$850, added another \$2,000 worth of new hose and equipment and housed the truck at Schaefer's Garage at 4219 Fredericksburg Road. This cost for residents would be less "for a number of years' protection than they would have paid the City of San Antonio for one year's protection," noted Mayor Gaskins.

Two years later the frugal council paid off the \$502 owed on the fire department's first-aid car, refinanced it for \$1,300 and used the balance toward the \$2,600 cost of a new 750-gallon pumper to add to the young department.<sup>6</sup>

Then there was the matter of law enforcement.

"Are they running a speed trap in Balcones Heights, the pint-sized town in north San Antonio?" wondered acerbic *Evening News* writer Paul Thompson in his front-page column on May 1, 1955.

"They sure are," came the answering quote from a local builder, who claimed he got a ticket for driving 20 miles an hour in a school zone. "This laying for motorists has been going on for two years in Balcones Heights, and it's about time someone fought it."

Thompson said the county sheriff's office told of "a steady run of squawks about wholesale ticketing of motorists in Balcones Heights." Then he reported how Mayor Frank Gaskins "sprang to the defense" of his two-man police force.

"We enforce the speed laws out here and we'll continue to do it," Thompson quoted Gaskins as saying. Noting that the accused later allowed that he "might have been going 21 or 22 mph," Gaskins marveled that the accused "admits he broke the law a little bit. Can you rob a bank a little bit? Can you murder your wife a little bit? We take the view that a little bit is the same as a whole lot."<sup>7</sup>

San Antonio's three daily newspapers, locked in an interminable circulation war, were hungry for headlines. A "speed trap" made perfect fodder.

Nine days later the press was out in force to cover a council meeting that drew 50 residents. Seven-year veteran constable Jack Casper had resigned the previous month over the department's operation by his former deputy, Chief Robert C. Pryor Jr., described by Thompson as "the fellow who hands out most traffic tickets." Reporters expected speeding issues to take center stage.

One headline the next day did lead off, "Citizens in Uproar." However, the big fuss turned out instead to be over zoning complaints. Opponents of Gaskins confronted him with charges of "autocratic control," but then came a 26-4 vote of confidence in his administration from the crowd.

Gaskins defended his refusal to let one reporter see court records of arrests, saying the request had been made under "false



Calumny may have been heaped upon Police Chief Bob Pryor for his department's rigorous enforcement of traffic laws, but he could point with pride—as he did on January 21, 1966—to an enviable traffic fatality-free record within Balcones Heights.

pretenses." He pointed out that Fredericksburg Road was the only major highway entering San Antonio that had not been the scene of at least one traffic fatality that year.<sup>8</sup>

From a sister suburb came the editorializing of Clyde Wantland, in his *Alamo Heights News*: "It's no credit to the critics that a law enforcement officer who enforces the law comes in for so much more criticism than one who fails to. . . . If there be ulterior motive for enforcement of the traffic laws in Balcones Heights, similar motive is needed in San Antonio for enforcement of the laws against gambling, dope-peddling and soldier-plucking."<sup>9</sup>

Fredericksburg Road, after all, was still the main highway from West Texas for drivers coming into San Antonio and even going south, inspiring early motel owners to catch tourists by promoting Balcones Heights as "The Gateway to Mexico." A state highway department survey in 1954 showed some 700 cars traveling the thoroughfare in one 12-hour period.<sup>10</sup> It did not take a large proportion of these to put parking space at the Balcones Heights city hall at an early premium on court days on alternate Saturdays.

As a reporter described the scene in 1955, an hour before court began cars had already "rolled onto the city hall lawn, parked in driveways and lined up in the ditches of Balcones' unpaved and unscrubbed streets." Inside, "informality was the keynote" as Mayor Frank Gaskins, "in house slippers and tee shirt, lined up miscreants and accepted payment of fines."

By the time of arrival of the judge—Emmett J. Rahm, who once did similar duty for San Antonio—"a line of speeders . . . snaked in front of the bench and out a side door." The accused paused as Judge Rahm "stopped several times to answer the telephone on his bench and asked callers how they wished to plead." In the packed courtroom, "sweltering" in mid-May, "spectators inched through front and back doors to watch proceedings."<sup>11</sup>

Traffic tickets would be the most sensitive subject for Balcones Heights officials for some time to come. Rather than spend \$1,500 for a radar unit that had to be operated by three patrolmen—more than Balcones Heights had—in 1958 the city bought a \$500 "Speed Watch." The 11-jewel affair registered speeds transmitted from two rubber tubes 22 1/2 feet apart on the highway onto the dial of a box beside the road, with an advertised accuracy of within a hundredth of a second.<sup>12</sup>

Shortly after he was elected mayor in 1960, J. C. Frazier wrote, "Mention is being made continually about the percentage of our revenue derived from fines. Let me just say this. We not only can get along without this revenue, we had much rather get along without it. We do not like to issue traffic tickets."<sup>13</sup>

Frazier could get by with his comments since Balcones Heights was at last implementing property taxation, approved two years earlier. Otherwise it is hard to imagine how the city could have managed without revenue from traffic tickets. Totals for 10 months in the late 1950s show the only regular sources of income as corporation court—\$19,320—and building permits, a mere

A packed meeting at Balcones Heights city hall in 1955 turned into an "uproar" after Carl Donagan raised his fist to accuse Mayor Frank Gaskins of suppressing a zoning matter. The mayor's administration ended up with a vote of confidence from the crowd.



\$664. Salaries came to \$12,198 and operational expenses to \$7,746, leaving a razor-thin surplus for the period of \$40.<sup>14</sup>

Perhaps the ultimate justification came in 1962. That summer the Greater San Antonio Safety Council presented Mayor Frazier with an award for 10 consecutive years without a single traffic fatality on the streets of Balcones Heights.<sup>15</sup>

But if it wasn't over traffic tickets, Balcones Heights in the 1950s was getting bad press about the condition of its residential streets, unpaved and washed out by heavy rains. Fredericksburg Road was maintained by the state, which in 1957 put traffic islands and blinking lights at the awkward intersection with Balcones Heights and Dewhurst roads and Spencer Lane. Balcones Heights residents wanting their own streets improved, however, were on their own.<sup>16</sup>

Rather than trying again to pay residents to be street workers, in the late 1950s Mayor Vernon LaBauve sought to improve chronic problems in the southern sector through a plan to buy 10 tons of asphalt and two 50-gallon barrels of oil for residents to use in repairing streets in front of their homes. Seven months later, eight residents of Pleasant Drive instead donated \$337.50 to the city, which matched the amount required to repair their street.<sup>17</sup>

The biggest bursts of bad publicity over streets came from Dewhurst Road residents in the northeastern corner. There Balcones Heights had deannexed to San Antonio some 20 acres along Dewhurst to the east in 1951—and would again, in 1964—to allow the sprawling Dellview subdivision to extend to Dewhurst Road. The road itself, however, remained within Balcones Heights.

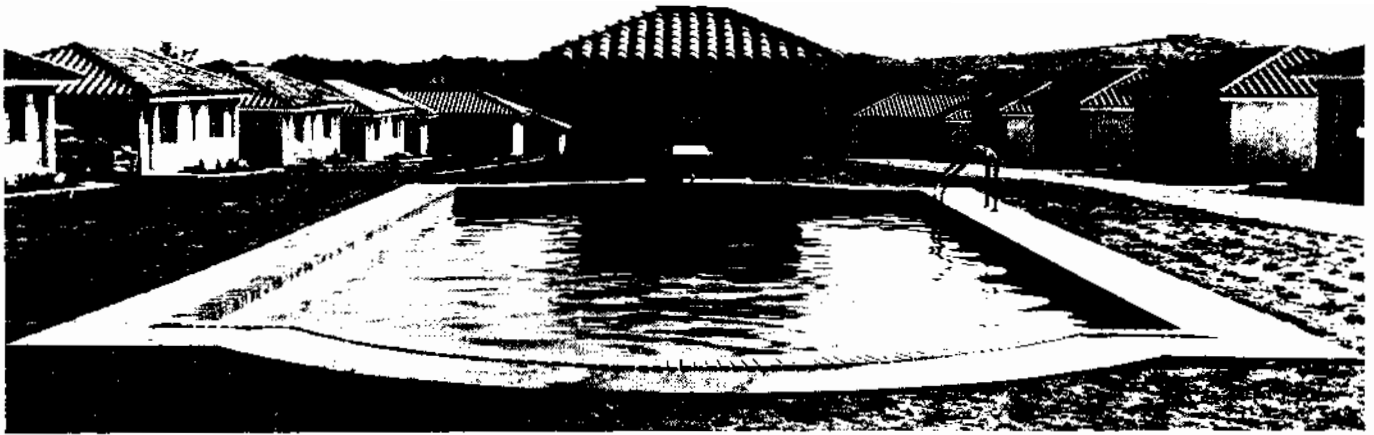
In the mid-1950s, Dewhurst residents—most of them living within San Antonio city limits—complained to the media of water runoff and blamed clouds of caliche dust from its surface for everything from dirty furniture to their childrens' sore throats.<sup>18</sup>

Mayor Gaskins countered that much of the runoff was coming from Dellview itself, and that the City of San Antonio was refusing to help. Gaskins pleaded municipal poverty due to no tax rev-

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*In the 1950s, clouds of dust from the unpaved Dewhurst Road were blamed for everything from dirty furniture to sore throats.*

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The first town tourists from West Texas reached as they neared San Antonio on U.S. 87, Balcones Heights was promoted as a "Gateway to Mexico," a theme reflected on the sign of Siesta Motor Court when it opened at 4441 Fredericksburg Road in 1949. The appropriately Spanish-style units had the latest in amenities—a swimming pool. Now known as Siesta Motel, it is the oldest business in Balcones Heights.

enue, then asked why any repairs should be done at the moment anyway, since new highway construction nearby might eventually correct the problem. The matter was resolved for good three years after the 1964 deannexation, when Balcones Heights agreed to purchase the paving materials and San Antonio agreed to furnish the labor and equipment.<sup>19</sup>

All told, in the two Dewhurst Road deannexations and in two others of 10 acres each—one in 1950 south of Balcones Heights Road and one in 1954 north of Hillcrest Drive—the City of Balcones shrunk its territory by nearly 10 percent, to an ultimate size of .7 square mile. Losing the empty area freed cash-poor Balcones Heights of having to make improvements for the new developments, which in the 1950s would not pay property taxes to cover costs since the city levied no taxes.<sup>20</sup>

More than that, cash-poor Balcones Heights was able to leverage free benefits from developers wishing to promote their new homes as having San Antonio services, as in the 1950 deannexation south of Balcones Heights Road. In that case, H. B. Zachry Properties agreed in return to lay water and sewer lines accessible to residents along the Balcones Heights side, connect adjacent Balcones Heights streets through the new subdivision to Babcock Road, make zoning restrictions, improve area drainage and, in addition, give unpaved Balcones Heights Road "a two-course penetration of oil."<sup>21</sup>

But paving-for-land exchanges included only oil and gravel, not a new base, thus simply circumventing the basic problem.

It was not deannexation, however, but another territorial move that would ultimately transform the future of Balcones Heights.

To improve access to a central business district isolated from a fast expanding metropolis, San Antonio planners in the early 1950s began outlining a system of expressways radiating from downtown. The designation of U.S. 87 was changed from Fredericksburg Road to a new expressway that would parallel the Southern Pacific Railroad to the north and west. But state engineers would not approve San Antonio planners' recommended route north past Magnolia Avenue to meet Loop 410 at Vance





Balcones Heights got its first traffic signals in 1957, when the state realigned the awkward Fredericksburg Road intersection with Balcones Heights and Dewhurst roads and Spencer Lane. In the background at left of center is the tower of Light House Courts, later the site of a Mazda dealership, where voters had approved the city's incorporation nine years before.

Jackson Road. The route was seen as too winding for a high-speed highway.

The best route was seen as veering west and then roughly paralleling Fredericksburg Road through eastern Balcones Heights.

Incorporated cities had to approve such thoroughfare routes through their territory. The City of Olmos Park several years later refused to let the preferred route of U.S. 281 pass through its already developed suburb, causing a decade of disputes and consternation until the expressway was finally rerouted around Olmos Park through the Olmos Creek basin.

The City of Balcones Heights, however, had a different outlook. Only scattered homes and open land were in this proposed highway's path. Moreover, the revenue-starved city fathers saw this as an opportunity for drivers to get off and shop in the parallel business district along Fredericksburg Road, and for new commercial construction on either side of the highway itself. Balcones Heights Mayor Frank Gaskins declared, "We think it is the best route they could pick."

After only "a short discussion," the Balcones Heights council approved the right-of-way on June 14, 1954.<sup>22</sup>

As the federal government began pouring more than \$100 billion into the national interstate highway program, this new expressway was designated part of Interstate 10. In 1958, the old Loop 13 that curved just beyond the boundary of Balcones Heights was widened into four-lane Interstate 410. A major in-



Without property taxes to cover basic municipal improvements, Balcones Heights suffered chronic street repair problems. Vivian Lane and connecting driveways, above, were washing out as late as 1962. Clouds of caliche dust from Dewhurst Road so distressed adjoining residents that two of them, R. L. Bell and Mrs. T. A. Duffy, right, took to watering down the dust with a garden hose one January morning in 1956.



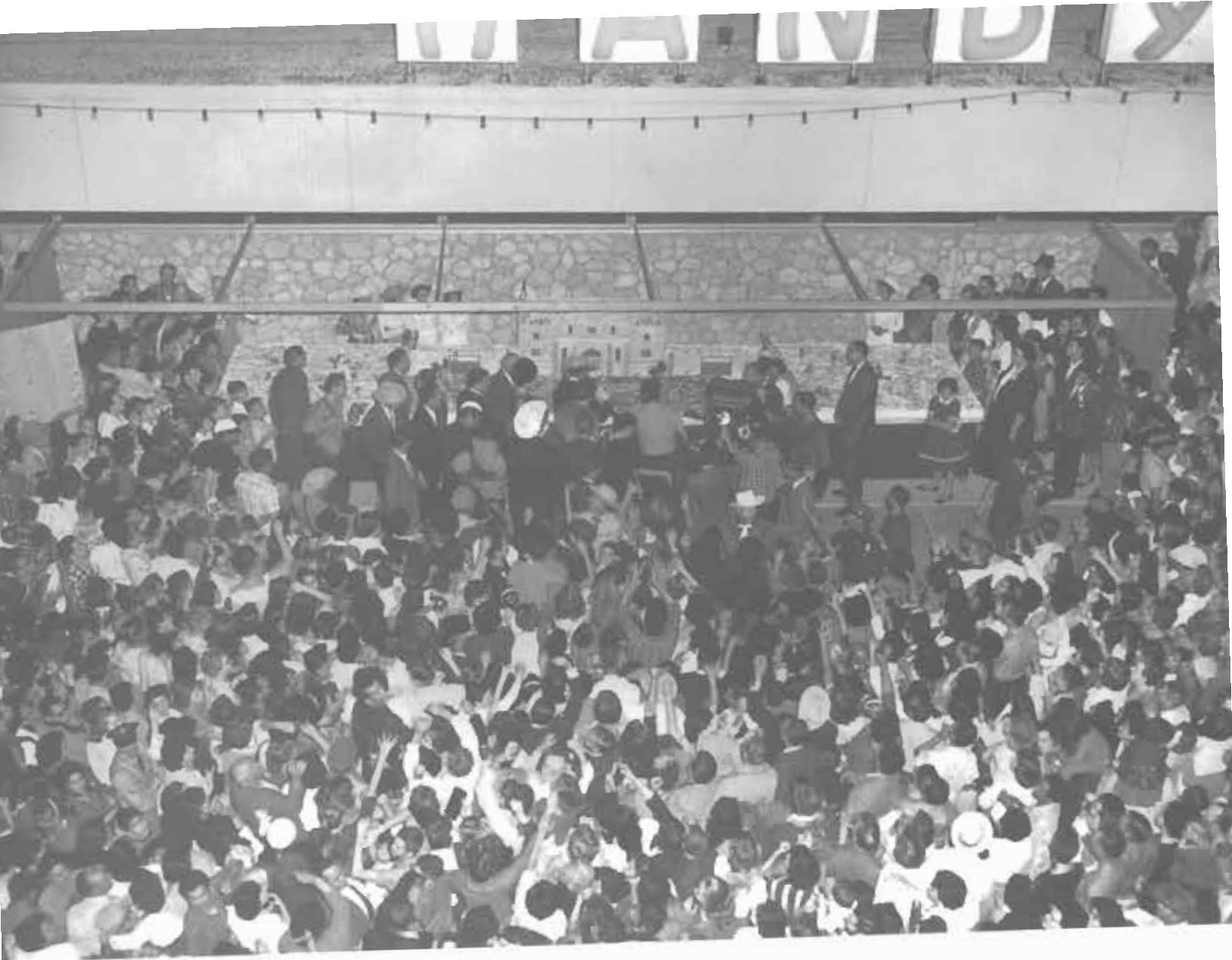
terchange between the two would nick the northern edge of Balcones Heights.

Two years earlier, Handy Andy supermarket magnate A. L. Becker's Community Realty Company had figured out what was going to happen. It put together some 50 acres at Fredericksburg and Gill roads, within sight of the anticipated interchange, and asked Balcones Heights to rezone it for commercial development. A Handy Andy opened at the edge of the site in May 1959.<sup>23</sup>

Hard times for Balcones Heights were about to end.



Economic salvation for Balcones Heights was imminent in this view looking north in 1959, as Interstate 10 construction workers, already making great progress beyond Loop 410, were about to begin the southern section through Balcones Heights. This would sever Gull Road, the segment angling off to the lower left to be known as Wonderland Drive and then Crossroads Boulevard after the mall that would arise at the intersection's southwest corner.



The new crossroads of two interstate highways at Balcones Heights vaulted the struggling suburb's location into a prime spot in the region. A sampling of hordes to come occurred in 1960, when a party for *The Alamo* movie's world premiere was held outside Handy Andy's new Balcones Heights supermarket. John Wayne himself, the movie's star, cut the cake.

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## 4. The World Rushes In

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When fate threw Balcones Heights a lifeline in the form of an interstate highway, its residents grabbed hold and hardly looked back. As Interstate 10's intersection with Loop 410 became a major crossroads of San Antonio, the modern era beat a quick path to the once downtrodden suburb.

No more did its elected officials have to worry about how to re-jigger second hand fire trucks or agonize over creative ways to fix the unpaved streets. In the rush of the 1960s came the metropolitan area's second regional shopping mall, followed by a blizzard of commercial and apartment construction.

Now that there was commercial property worth taxing, taxes were finally levied and two bond issues passed. Then came a master plan, paved streets, a drainage system and streetlights down Fredericksburg Road.

A preview of how dramatically things would change came on October 24, 1960, as celebrities flocked to San Antonio for the world premiere of the movie *The Alamo* at the Woodlawn Theater. Picked for the public celebration was the mall site up Fredericksburg Road beside the year-old Handy Andy supermarket in Balcones Heights. Its bakery produced what was billed as "The World's Largest Battle of the Alamo Cake." Movie stars descended on the suddenly dazzled suburb. John Wayne himself cut the cake. Television crews also struggled to keep up with the likes of Richard Boone, Chill Wills and Linda Cristal.

Not long after Wonderland Shopping City was up and running the next year, Balcones Heights scrambled to spend the bonanza pouring in from the new state retail sales tax. Streetlights went in residential neighborhoods, new policemen were added and 11 firemen were hired to replace the volunteers. Everybody got free garbage pick-up. The fast-growing staff dealing with it all moved from the old rock wellhouse into a magnificent new brick city hall with a second story no one yet knew what to do with.

Burgeoning mall merchants, seeming to morph from the tail into the dog itself, soon tried to wag the voters into changing the very name of Balcones Heights to Wonderland, Texas.

But despite the sudden prosperity, Balcones Heights residents remembered where they came from and held on to their identity.

The transition seemed to happen a bit too quickly for comfort. Help still had to be found to overhaul the fire truck, a second police car was needed and undirected runoff from the new Handy

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*When two interstate highways intersected at Balcones Heights, the world beat a path to the once downtrodden suburb.*

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Directing shoppers through the new maze of Wonderland Shopping City was none other than "Alice of Wonderland."

*Facing Page:* At the ribbon-cutting of the regional mall in Balcones Heights on September 14, 1961, were, from left, Montgomery Ward Corp. Vice President Russell Bygel, Wonderland Merchants Association President L. H. Flood, Balcones Heights Mayor J. C. Frazier, Woodworth Corp. Vice President W. L. Saunders, Alice of Wonderland (Donna Hansen), Community Realty Co. President A. L. Becker, mall-financing Great Southern Life Insurance Co. President Pat Greenwood, and San Antonio Mayor Pro Tem Gerald Parker.

Land ready for retail development surrounds the just-opened Wonderland at the new intersection of Interstates 410, far left to upper right, and I-10. Across Fredericksburg Road from the mall toward lower left is the old Tee Pee Indian Village Restaurant, to its lower right the Siesta Motel, which survives

Andy parking lot kept washing out Gill Road. Once mall construction got under way, city officials intensified efforts for a tax program and financed a bond issue for improvements needed by the mall, to say nothing of basic services for residents themselves.

Sewer connections with San Antonio were completed in the spring of 1961, but city bus service to Balcones Heights had to wait until the opening. Flind Drive through the site was renamed Wonderland Drive, which got the mall's name on Interstate 10 directional signs.<sup>1</sup>

The name "Wonderland" was picked by Jack Nicholson, the Denver-based development manager hired by the proposed mall's developers in mid-1960. "Since as much as three-fourths of mall sales occur at Christmastime," Nicholson recalled, "the name was to set up the mall to be a 'Winter Wonderland.' But we never got the budget to carry out the winter theme."<sup>2</sup> Still, the novelty of covered malls nationwide justified the name.

Wonderland moved off the drawing boards when Montgomery Ward signed up as the first anchor store, leading to the grand opening of the mall's first phase on September 14, 1961. Some 20,000 shoppers flocked there on opening day.

Those lost in the maze of Wonderland's indoor plazas and aisles could get help from—who else? "Alice of Wonderland," in her own information booth on the main concourse, "garbed in an unusual costume designed with a shocking pink, all-cotton suede cloth jumper and pale pink cotton blouse, jeweled headband and tie shoes."<sup>3</sup>

To the rescue of harried shopper-parents came the Balcones Heights Volunteer Fire Department Auxiliary, which ran a 100-seat "Cinemoppet Theater" on the lower level under the direction of auxiliary president—and later Balcones Heights mayor—Lucille Wohlfarth and of the auxiliary's theater operations director, Gertrude Conkle. In a free babysitting service for shoppers, childrens' movies were shown five times on afternoons and evenings and twice more on Saturday mornings. Compensation from mall management to the auxiliary benefited firefighters.<sup>4</sup>

The real "makings of a regional mall" came in 1964, when Rhodes Department Store signed up as a second anchor tenant. That was followed the next year by several companies of Dallas entrepreneur Charles Tandy taking 50,000 square feet on Wonderland's lower level. The multilevel facility covered 17 acres of floor space on a 60-acre site, with 62 stores employing 1,200 people and drawing a daily average of 15,000.<sup>5</sup>

As Wonderland prospered, familiar retail names began appearing on the new buildings along Fredericksburg Road, replacing smaller ones that had marked Balcones Heights as an almost-rural community. Jorrie's Furniture—later Lack's—nabbed a prime site at Fredericksburg Road and Hillcrest Drive in 1962.

Daniel Webster, a former Arkansas state legislator elected to his first term as Balcones Heights mayor in 1964, became a familiar figure at the many groundbreakings. There he was in the newspapers wielding a shovel to bring Wonder Plaza and its Western Auto, Bonanza Sirloin Pit and Denny's to 4515 Fredericksburg Road next to North Point Plaza, which obliterated the site of the old Indian Village Restaurant. In 1966 Webster was cutting the ribbon at the opening of the 115,000 square-foot Woolco Department Store south of the mall and of Wonder Theater in the parking lot to its north. The next year he was snapped across the street at a new Jim's Coffee Shop and, in another shovel shot, at the site of a new Luby's Cafeteria.

Unlike those who ran the original restaurants, motels and stores along Fredericksburg Road, the ever-rotating personnel of the new retail megacomplex belonged more to the cultures of their particular chain than to the long term fabric of life in Balcones Heights. Likewise, tenants of apartment buildings lining Gentleman Drive and in nooks along nearby streets also generally lacked the roots of homeowners nearby. The job of making the transformed city work would fall mainly to its permanent residents.

Accordingly, it was Councilman Vernon LaBauve, the San Antonio College administrator and recent mayor, who in 1961 chaired the committee backing a bond issue to finance, at last, a respectable base of municipal services. And it was Mayor J. C. Frazier who the next year had to take hat in hand to local banks for a \$5,000 loan—that had to be renewed—to keep the city running until the tax money came in. For of the \$46,000 needed to run the city in 1963, property taxes had to provide more than half. Revenue from traffic fines alone could not carry Balcones Heights into the new world.<sup>6</sup>

*As Wonderland prospered, familiar retail names began appearing along adjacent Fredericksburg Road.*



Raising funds by running a "Cinemoppet Theater" for children of Wonderland shoppers were Balcones Heights Volunteer Fire Department Auxiliary members, from left, back, Refugia Perez, Gertrude Conkle, Elizabeth Swain, Lucille Wohlfarth, Hortense Howard, Gloria Staewen, Clara Kruse, Dorothy Burch, Mae Hannasch; front, Hazel Courtney, Eva Stanley, Elizabeth Fraley, Kathleen Drifill, Bette Drifill and Eleanor Stryker.

The need for tax revenue was brought home yet again in the fall of 1962, when clouds of dust from drought-dried gravel streets led to bids for an oiling project to keep the dust down. Street work was a major part—40 percent—of the \$230,000 capital improvements bond issue approved by the voters that winter. The rest was earmarked for sewer lines, storm sewers and drainage projects, all executed under a master plan prepared by the engineering firm of Willard E. Simpson.<sup>7</sup>

And still there was the issue of water. Residents of southern Balcones Heights had enjoyed dependable service since 1953, when their old system was given to the City of Balcones Heights and, in turn, to San Antonio. The old Country Gentleman Estates system, however, continued to operate independently. Its owner in 1960, Charles T. Smith, had answered complaints of low pressure by giving Balcones Heights the chance to buy the system before he had to raise rates to improve it. The city could not afford to accept.<sup>8</sup>

Higher rates, however, did not make the problems go away. Fortunately, the city could soon afford to pay \$6,000 for the water system through a second bond issue—approved in 1964—totaling \$100,000 and also including more sewer and street improvements. The obsolescent system was shut down.

Once new San Antonio water mains were finished, Balcones Heights capped the old well. San Antonio's City Public Service Board installed natural gas lines throughout Balcones Heights the same year.<sup>9</sup>

Soon an unexpected bonanza seemed to make the need for bond issues a thing of the past. In 1967 the State of Texas permitted municipalities to add a surcharge to state sales taxes for their own use. At the end of the year, 93 percent of the voters in a special Balcones Heights approved, not surprisingly, adding 1 percent to the sales tax for use within Balcones Heights.<sup>10</sup>



In 1964 Daniel Webster, far left, began 18 years as mayor during a pivotal era. Also being sworn in by Municipal Judge Joe Stateson, right, are, from Webster's left, councilmen Wallace Beck, Henry Hannasch Jr., Vernon LaBauve, J. D. Kalafat and George Black. The notice thumbtacked to the front of the table: "Please, No cigarette butts or matches on floor. Use ash trays. Thanks."

Thanks to healthy sales at Wonderland, by 1971 an additional \$175,000 was pouring into the city treasury annually. In the last quarter of 1974 alone, Christmas sales provided Balcones Heights with nearly \$150,000. Improvements could now be funded not by raising taxes to finance bond issues, but directly from operating income. Balcones Heights property tax rates became among the lowest in Bexar County.<sup>11</sup>

In the wake of the new revenues, the Balcones Heights annual budget quadrupled from \$80,000 in 1967 to \$300,000 three years later. Residents' annual garbage pick-up fees were eliminated, 30 new street lights were added, the police force was increased to seven full-time patrolmen, volunteers were replaced by 11 fully salaried firemen and the awkward intersection of Fredericksburg, Balcones Heights and Dewhurst roads and Spencer Lane was realigned for good.<sup>12</sup>

Then some Wonderland merchants, sensing a chance for a payback for putting Balcones Heights on its feet, had an idea. In 1963 they had come up with the thoughtful suggestion that the mayor and council members pay themselves salaries. Now, six years and a sales tax windfall later, mall merchants thought it appropriate that the city change its name to Wonderland, Texas. The Texas Highway Department estimated the cost of changing signs at \$2,700. Given a "favorable business climate," the mall promised to spend \$100,000 to promote the renamed city.<sup>13</sup>

A petition for an election was presented and a vote was set for December 6, 1969. Backers mailed a flurry of cards urging residents to "Give Yourself a Wonderful Holiday Gift" and "Vote YES for WONDERLAND. . . you'll be glad you did." Columnist

Among municipal benefits of a sales tax revenue bonanza from a new regional mall was construction of a new city hall in 1971.



Paul Thompson front-paged the grump of a Balcones Heights resident that the change was bound to pass since the "council wants it." But whether the council wanted it or not, the proposal failed by a vote of 97 to 78.<sup>14</sup>

Balcones Heights might still be Balcones Heights. But there was no question that its fiber had changed forever. In 1963, municipal business had grown so that the council had to nearly double the number of meetings held the previous year, to 23. Increasing the operational workload was everything from zoning matters to a steady stream of permit requests from the new mall—for fireworks displays, cat shows, elephant rides. As the population of Balcones Heights reached 2,500 in 1970, the crowded old wellhouse could no longer handle its role as city hall.

So it was that on May 1, 1971, a crowd gathered a block away to hear Congressman O. C. Fisher speak at the dedication of a splendid two-story brick city hall to house the city's administrative staff, municipal court and police department. The \$124,000 structure was designed by Balcones Heights resident Bruce Johnson of the firm of Johnson, Dempsey and Associates and built under chief contractor Wendell Griggs.

"We don't have any immediate use for the second floor," explained retired Army Lt. Col. Elmer C. Newman, in his seventh year as the city's secretary-treasurer, "but the architect suggested we could save money by adding it now instead of later."<sup>15</sup>

Rapid-fire improvements may have been occurring without any new taxation, and without the need of bond issues required in cities with a lower proportion of commercial-to-residential development. The fate of Balcones Heights, however, was now inextricably tied to the ups and downs of the larger world, forcing the small suburb to face the problems and challenges of cities many times its physical size.





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## 5. New Realities

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Over the course of merely one decade, the turnaround in Balcones Heights was nothing short of astonishing. At the beginning of the 1960s it was a community with so few resources that if residents wanted the streets in front of their houses patched they had to pick up the asphalt and spread it themselves.

Ten years later the city had so much revenue it could lay pavement on its own without raising taxes a cent, all while upgrading elsewhere and planning a municipal services complex.

There came, however, a dark side to the coin.

The sudden prosperity of Balcones Heights was due to its location at a new crossroads of San Antonio. This is what drew the shoppers to the megamall, filled the new apartment complexes and more than paid the bills. But as development nearly filled its territory of less than one square mile, the exaggerated levels of traffic and commerce forced Balcones Heights and its 2,500 residents to deal with the problems of a city of 30,000.

By the 1980s, Balcones Heights may have been among the smallest of the dozen Bexar County suburbs, but its crime rate was the highest. It may have had the most sales tax revenue, but it was also most vulnerable to competitive forces from new, distant malls and was most affected by national retailing cycles.

Balcones Heights may have been a suburb in name, but its population density was higher than most urban areas of similar size in Texas. As apartment and commercial properties slipped into absentee ownerships and began to decay, Balcones Heights also had to deal with the unfamiliar headaches of urban renewal.

Crime became an issue in the 1972 city election, when a slate of five candidates sought to overthrow the incumbents by campaigning for stricter law enforcement, better fire protection and improved recreation facilities. Incumbents led by veteran mayor Daniel Webster won handily but did not ignore the problems.<sup>1</sup>

In October 1974, Balcones Heights marked its twenty-fifth anniversary with the dedication of a handsome four-bay brick fire station of a design similar to the city hall it stood beside. The old concrete block fire station on Glenarm Place was dedicated in 1983 as the Balcones Heights Community Service Center. Five years later it was remodeled. Also in 1983, the old rock city hall, used for storage but surrounded by tall grass, was tidied up under leadership of the new Balcones Heights Senior Citizens Organization.<sup>2</sup>

In 1987 Wonderland Shopping City became Crossroads of San Antonio and, in a second major renovation, gained a Palm Pavilion, entered from a plaza with a pool and fountain and water cascading beside a descending sidewalk.



Dedication of a new fire station in 1974 occurred during the twenty-fifth anniversary of the incorporation of Balcones Heights. The former fire station was remodeled as the Balcones Heights Community Center.



But despite increasing its police force to 13 patrolmen, Balcones Heights maintained the highest crime rate among Bexar county's incorporated suburbs. In 1979, as its population neared 3,000, there were 505 reported crime incidents in Balcones Heights, compared with 473 in the second-place suburb, Universal City, with its population of nearly 11,000."

The figures look bad," admitted then Assistant Balcones Heights Police Chief Kenneth Menn, "but there's another side to this." Of the reported incidents, he said, 383—or three-fourths—were larceny cases, most of which were shoplifters nabbed by

Mayor Kirk Colyer with Cruz and Dolores Sanchez at the reopening of Cillie Novak Park in 1985.



Wonderland Shopping City security workers. The mall parking area's Park and Ride bus terminal was convenient, but it also provided a target for auto battery thieves. And burglars, provided easy access by major traffic arteries through Balcones Heights, were drawn to the city's hard-to-patrol apartment complexes.<sup>3</sup>

Then, during an early morning robbery in May 1983, the manager of a local franchise restaurant was fatally stabbed. It was the first Balcones Heights homicide in memory. As crime awareness rose, some 70 residents crowding city council chambers that fall agreed that a Neighborhood Crime Watch Program was in order. "We're all going to look out for each other," said Councilwoman Mary Louise Evans.<sup>4</sup> A year later, a Balcones Heights policeman caught a robbery suspect following a shootout outside a home improvement warehouse.

In March 1989 came two shootings in as many weeks. In one, Deputy Marshal Richard Scott Rogiers, age 29, in his sixth year on the force, was shot to death by a motorist he had stopped for a traffic violation. More than 300 lawmen from throughout South Texas attended his funeral services in his hometown of Castroville, joining a procession led by a police motorcycle escort and more than 50 patrol cars, their barlights flashing.

Eleven days later, Sgt. Steve Fuchs, 30, was wounded in the neck during a shootout at an apartment complex. The assailants were apprehended.<sup>5</sup>

Continued vandalism caused Cillie Novak Park to be closed in the fall of 1984. Residents rose up to see that the longtime park, with its coveted softball diamond, was renovated and reopened the following spring. A second park, opened with tennis and volleyball courts on Pleasant Drive in 1974, was also refurbished and was named Richard Scott Rogiers Park in memory of the slain police officer.<sup>6</sup>

By 1988, as the traffic count through the city rose to 171,000 vehicles per day, nearly two-thirds of them on Interstate 10, reported crime incidents rose to 962. In 1992 the Police Department



The badge of slain Balcones Heights Deputy Marshal Richard Scott Rogiers, 29, was replicated on the plaque in the park now bearing his name.



The "Grand Re-Creation of Wonderland Mall" brought high-fashion Frost Bros. to Balcones Heights in 1981.

opened a storefront annex on the upper level of Crossroads mall. As new technology, new police department efficiencies and increased citizen awareness took effect, Balcones Heights saw its relative criminal incidents ranking among Bexar County's suburbs drop to fourth.<sup>7</sup>

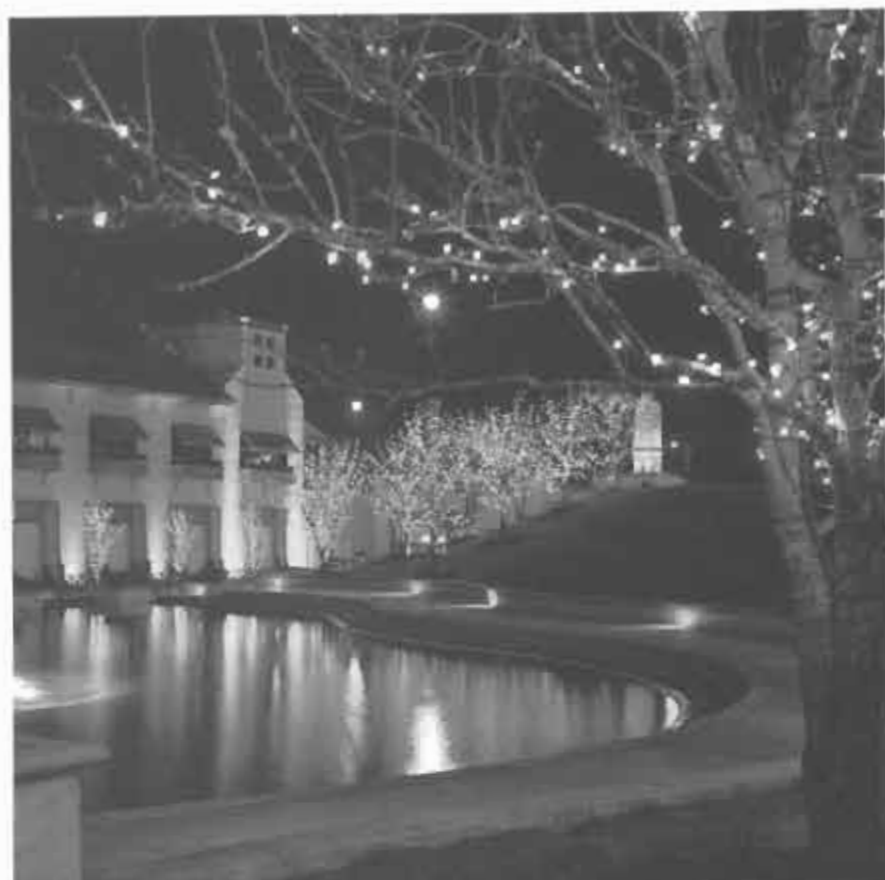
Even as Balcones Heights residents adjusted to the same fears and dangers their neighbors dealt with in adjoining San Antonio, there was still much to celebrate. The city held its first Christmas parade the day after Thanksgiving in 1977, its fire trucks leading the procession through the streets from Wonderland and back.

Two-term Mayor Kirk Colyer, who at age 27 succeeded Daniel Webster, boosted commerce-rich Balcones Heights as a "Free Enterprise City." In 1983 he gained headlines by concocting "The World's Largest Free Enterprise Parade and Run," with Congressman Henry B. Gonzalez as grand marshal. The event ended with a festival and 20 food booths at Wonderland.<sup>8</sup>

By 1982, the fortunes of Wonderland Shopping City, by far the largest producer of retail sales in Balcones Heights caused sales tax receipts—\$82,000 in 1969—to soar to \$944,000, making up 90 percent of the municipal budget. That kept property taxes at a low 20 cents per \$100 valuation, one-quarter of the rate in San Antonio. No other Bexar County community was as dependent on the sales tax. Should there be a sudden slip in sales, the effect on Balcones Heights could be traumatic.

Thus alarms went off in the fall of 1982 when sales taxes were lagging by nearly 18 percent. Until then, sales tax revenues for Balcones Heights had increased every year but two—in 1971, when they dropped by 9 percent, and 1979, when they were down one percent. Revenues caught up by the end of 1982, but four years later Mayor Emil Deike had to deal with a more serious problem.<sup>9</sup>

The remake of Wonderland Shopping City into Crossroads of San Antonio in 1987 included a fountain court surrounded by earthen banks that could seat hundreds at outdoor concerts.



Part of the trouble was due to the city's aging population; the number of senior citizens was as high as 60 percent. A doubling of senior citizen homestead exemptions in 1986 meant a large loss of property tax revenues.

More ominously, the beginning of a statewide economic collapse sent retail sales plummeting. Balcones Heights, scrambling, had to lay off all five civilian police dispatchers and shift the work to fire department dispatchers, saving \$103,000 in salaries and benefits. Property taxes, down to 7.55 cents per \$100 valuation, had to increase by 35 percent to support even a reduced municipal budget, pared down 10 percent to \$1.65 million for 1987.<sup>10</sup>

By the fall of 1988 the tax rate had to be more than doubled just to get the annual budget to the necessary level and add \$10,000 to complete a \$150,000 plan for badly needed street repairs, without the benefit of higher sales tax revenues. Outraged residents, led by senior citizens, revolted.

In January 1989, residents voted 184 to 109 to roll back taxes close to the previous level. The action sent refunds totaling \$127,000 to taxpayers. The dismayed Mayor Deike pointed out to the insurgents that due to tax breaks in place for senior citizens, he, as a senior citizen himself, got back barely four dollars. A \$2 million bond issue was suggested to fund badly needed street projects. Instead, that fall the city council raised taxes again—by a more modest 41 percent—to cover a \$2.2 million operating

VIA, San Antonio's metropolitan transit system, maintains a regional passenger terminal and Park and Ride in Balcones Heights, at Crossroads Boulevard and Interstate 10.



budget for the coming year. This time, rollback proponents did not stir.<sup>11</sup>

Driving the roller-coaster fortunes of Balcones Heights were decisions made and actions taken not just in Bexar County, but in distant points of the nation and even Europe, where the new owners of Wonderland were headquartered. In 1977, Community Realty Company had sold two-thirds of its interest in Wonderland Shopping City to the Lehndorff Group of Hamburg, West Germany, for an estimated \$12 million. Lehndorff purchased the balance two years later.<sup>12</sup>

The new owners, operating the mall through a subsidiary company in Dallas, were dealing with a newly competitive situation in the fast-growing suburban areas of northern San Antonio around the arc of Loop 410. The market shares of 15-year-old Wonderland along with North Star and Central Park malls nearly four miles to the east were being threatened by new competition from three regional malls built or about to be built on three flanks: Ingram Park, on Loop 410 four miles southwest of Wonderland; Windsor Park, six miles east of North Star and Central Park; and Rivercenter, with easy interstate access six miles south in downtown San Antonio.

The old equilibrium was about to be upset.

Quick improvements at Wonderland did not lag behind those occurring at North Star and Central Park. A \$7 million renovation at Wonderland added fountains, skylights, new floors and restaurant groupings. The number of stores rose from 70 to 85. High-fashion Frost Bros. spent \$3 million to create a new branch in the empty wing first occupied by Rhodes and then by Liberty House. "The Grand Re-Creation of Wonderland Mall" was celebrated in mid-1981 with a 7,000-invitation gala featuring food, entertainment and an address by San Antonio Mayor Henry Cisneros.<sup>13</sup>

As the economy soared in the early 1980s, Wonderland's owners capitalized on the mall's location at two interstate highways and renamed the mall Crossroads of San Antonio. The renaming heralded a \$300 million redevelopment that was to nearly double retail space in the mall and add, nearby, a 200-





Within Balcones Heights are First Unitarian-Universalist Church at Interstate 10 and Beryl Drive and, below, St. Gregory the Great Catholic Church and School at 700 Dewhurst Road.

room hotel plus six office towers as high as 18 stories with a million square feet of space.

One anachronism was handled in the process—the Handy Andy supermarket where John Wayne had cut the Alamo cake. Grocery stores had once been welcome anchors at covered malls. But the concept of such once-stop shopping was out of style, and Handy Andy still had 20 years left on its lease. In exchange for seven acres of adjacent land on Fredericksburg Road, Handy Andy surrendered its lease and built a 34,000-square-foot store in a center with twice as much additional space for others, including former mall tenants Eckerd Drugs and Winn's.<sup>14</sup>

Crossroads of San Antonio unveiled its completed \$30 million first phase in time for the Christmas shopping season in 1987. The grand opening centered on the Palm Pavilion, an indoor area with a dozen 35-foot palm trees from Florida, plus an outdoor plaza surrounded by waterfalls beside a stairway, grassy banks, a reflecting pool and a large fountain. The area was also the entrance for the six-screen theater that replaced the old two-screen Wonder Theater in the far corner of the parking area.<sup>15</sup>

But as the drop in sales tax revenues had warned those at Balcones Heights city hall, hard times were ahead. The state's major banking institutions began to fall like dominoes. Much-touted Frost Bros. went bankrupt, and Crossroads Mall lost other large tenants as well.

An Indiana research firm called in to explain things decided that having upscale Frost Bros. with such lower-priced retailers as Montgomery Ward and Stein Mart had created "an inconsistent tenant mix," one the researchers found "not at all common." The recommendation was that Crossroads fill an open niche in the San Antonio market and become not a "discount center," but a "value center," to appeal to thrifty shoppers.<sup>16</sup>

Crossroads owners wasted little time filling the niche. As the economy improved in mid-1990, the mall signed up Burlington Coat Factory for the yawning Frost Bros. space. Also added were such stores targeting value-oriented, fashion-conscious consumers as Lerner New York and County Seat Outlet, plus Phar-Mor, a large-volume drugstore.<sup>17</sup>

The new strategy combined with a reinvigorated economy to restore vitality to Crossroads and thus to Balcones Heights. The

At the key interchange of interstates 10 and 410 is the headquarters of TransGuide, the regional computerized traffic monitoring system.



Midland, Texas-based MRO Properties Inc. assumed ownership of Crossroads in 1996, the year the 112-room Sumner Suites opened at the northwest corner of the mall's property.

Past the mall parking area's northeast corner, within a loop created by a highway interchange, rose a different structure, a futuristic three-story center housing TransGuide, one of the nation's first computer-controlled traffic management systems.

TransGuide's computer operators in Balcones Heights direct traffic movements throughout the San Antonio area, using fiber optics, sensors and remote cameras to detect changes in traffic flow and, within 15 seconds, to transmit new directional messages to overhead highway signs in the affected area. The completed system is to cover nearly 200 miles of highways in the region. It is already credited with a 15 percent reduction in overall interstate highway traffic accidents and with a 20 percent reduction in emergency response time.



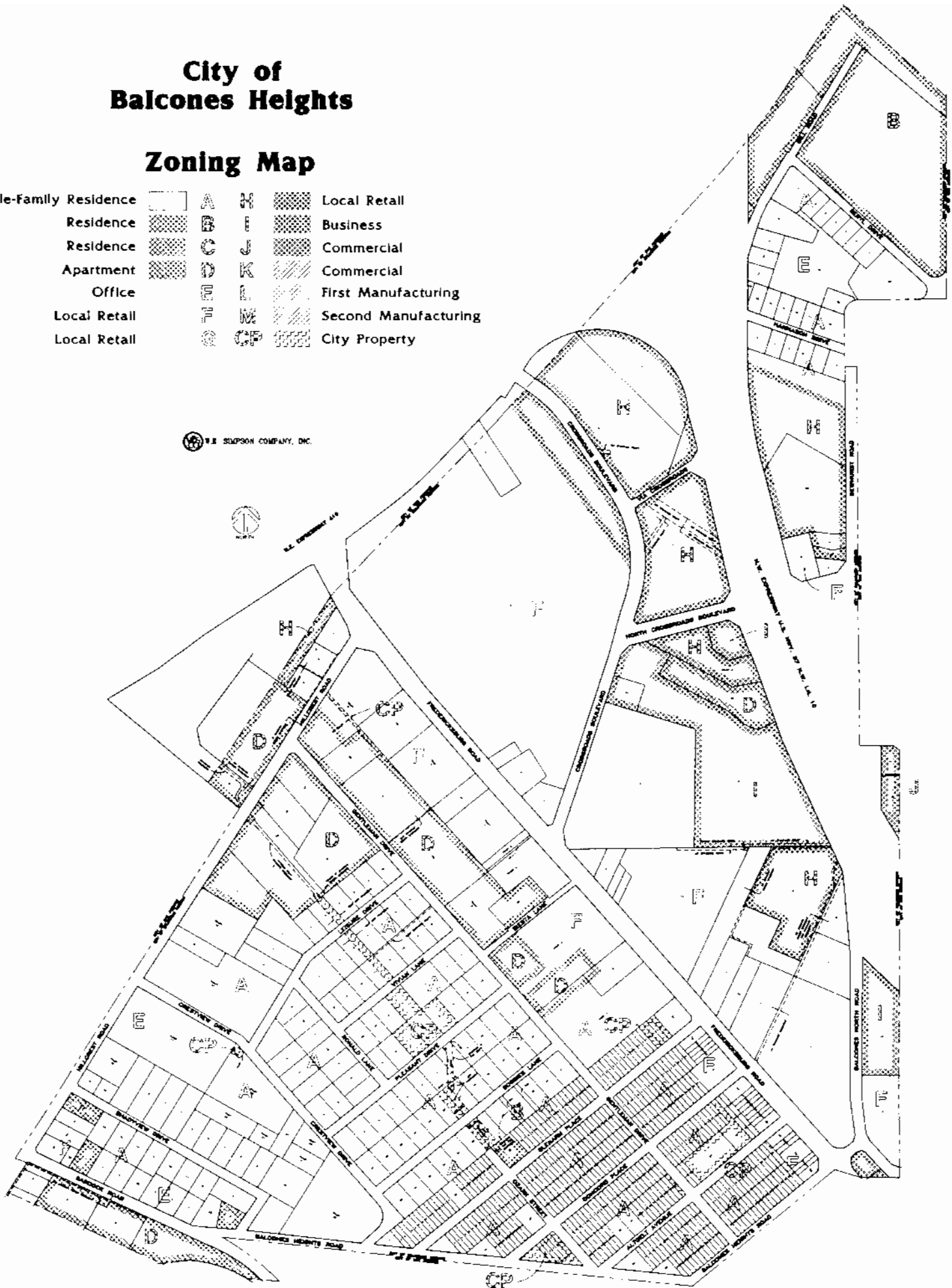
TransGuide computer operators in Balcones Heights monitor traffic flow along interstate highways in the San Antonio area.

# City of Balcones Heights

## Zoning Map

|                         |   |    |                      |
|-------------------------|---|----|----------------------|
| Single-Family Residence | A | H  | Local Retail         |
| Residence               | B | I  | Business             |
| Residence               | C | J  | Commercial           |
| Apartment               | D | K  | Commercial           |
| Office                  | E | L  | First Manufacturing  |
| Local Retail            | F | M  | Second Manufacturing |
| Local Retail            | G | CP | City Property        |

W.E. SAMPSON COMPANY, INC.



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## 6. Balcones Heights at 50

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A half-century after its tumultuous founding, Balcones Heights remains distinct among Bexar County's 20 incorporated suburbs.

In territory, the pear-shaped city of .7 square mile is among the smallest, its density by far the highest. More than half of its land is a commercial district dominated by aptly named Crossroads, one of the largest shopping malls in South Texas, nestled between the intersection of interstate highways 10 and 410 and Fredericksburg Road, which diagonally bisects Balcones Heights. Approximately 80 percent of its residents live in apartments.

Feeding retail outlets in the mall and elsewhere in Balcones Heights is a daily average of 205,000 vehicles carrying some 307,000 people. Sixty percent of the vehicles travel Interstate 10 from downtown San Antonio into fast-developing affluent suburban areas to the northwest. An average of 100,000 vehicles travel daily nearby on Loop 410.

Such an unusually high volume of traffic and commerce produces retail sales taxes that provide one of the highest proportions of any municipal budget in the state—fully half of the Balcones Heights city budget of \$3.5 million in 1999. This reliance, on the other hand, requires Balcones Heights city hall to be particularly alert in times of economic slowdown.

All this activity also gives Balcones Heights—population 3,200—the problems of a city many times its size. Balcones Heights municipal court handles some 9,000 cases each year, comparable to the load of a city of 30,000. Full-time police department personnel number half of all full-time municipal employees—24 out of 50, plus 13 of the city's 18 part-time employees. There are 19 uniformed firemen and seven full-time and five part-time general administrative personnel.

Overseeing city operations is, in general, a remarkably small percentage of residents who maintain a municipal government notable for its stability.

Although there are two dozen homes at the northeastern tip bordering San Antonio's Dellview subdivision, the main residential area of Balcones Heights is southwest of Fredericksburg Road. This is separated, in turn, into a northern arc of apartment complexes above traditional suburban streets lined with single-family homes—of which Balcones Heights has fewer than 300, compared with more than 1,400 apartment units.



These apartments on Gentleman Drive are among those housing some 80 percent of the populace of Balcones Heights.





The Balcones Heights police force includes, from left, standing, Sgt. Raymond Menchaca, Michael Bevens, Mario Hernandez, Michael Branch, Danny Tumlinson, Troy Powers, Assistant Chief Robert de la Garza, Juan F. Torrez, Reine Scheer, Chief Kenneth Menn, Bruce Timmons, Maynard Spikes, Mark Vasquez, Sgt. William Bailey, Charles Peña, Sgt. Ronald Deal, Rodolfo Acuna, Sgt. Donald Hill Jr., seated, Sgt. Joyce Wallace, Chad Garcia, Barbara Tuttle.

While Balcones Heights has had its share of highly contested elections, its government has an enviable record of stability. During one period of critical growth, the tenure of Mayor Daniel Webster lasted 18 years, and makeup of the city council at one point remained unchanged for six years.

At the time of the city's fiftieth anniversary celebration in 1999, Lucille Wohlfarth, a Balcones Heights resident since 1947, had already served as mayor for five years, following 10 years as a councilwoman—six of them in the 1970s.

Of top city administrators, Roy L. Miller, who joined the city in 1973, had served as chief administrative officer for 17 years. Charles W. Matthies, a fireman since 1969, had been fire chief for 21 years. Kenneth R. Menn, a policeman since 1973, had been police chief for seven years. Bobby de la Garza, inspired as a neighborhood child during visits with veteran chief Bob Pryor, first joined the police force in 1972, returned in 1986 and became assistant chief 10 years later. A half dozen other employees had equally impressive tenures. Ann Fry, city secretary for six years, was a relative newcomer.

At the close of the century, city government found itself dealing with the complex issues of urban renewal in a mature city. Median Balcones Heights home values in 1990 were similar to those in adjoining areas of San Antonio—\$59,000—as was the median annual family income of \$18,250, skewed downward by the large number of lower-income senior citizens.

Homes were occupied by a largely aging population, with half of the 200 homestead exemptions claimed by residents over age



Based at Balcones Heights city hall are, from left, rear, maintenance men David Castro and Richard Hartman, Building Inspector Howard Gregory, City Secretary Ann Fry; front, Delia Flores, Rhonica Garcia, Yvonne Baez and City Administrator Roy L. Miller.



65. While most of the 28 apartment complexes were well maintained, others, owned by absentee landlords, showed signs of their age. Many, built in the 1960s for adult tenants, lacked the open spaces required for children of the many young families moving in.

Balcones Heights residents, in the mid-1990s, decided to turn things around.

By stressing congestion caused by the city's unusually high population density, perhaps the highest in Texas, after lengthy negotiations Balcones Heights in 1995 obtained federal urban renewal funds to purchase the decaying four-acre Alta Villa apartment complex in the 3200 block of Hillcrest Drive. The structures were torn down in part to create new open space that would meet the needs of the younger families, who by the late 1990s were bringing the city's proportion of senior citizens down to some 40 percent.

While some commercial land was still open to new development, the strip-center ambience of much of pedestrian-unfriendly Fredericksburg Road did not encourage upgrading of existing older sites. City hall saw opportunity.

In 1996, the city council authorized a Southwest Texas State University report on uses for the year-old 7 percent hotel-motel tax. The next year, a wide-ranging street design seminar was conducted under Steve Tillotson by the San Antonio Chapter of the American Institute of Architects. In 1998 the University of Texas at San Antonio's Institute for Studies in Business completed a two-volume economic development study for the city.

In 1999, a master plan steering committee headed by Pamela Hodges was synthesizing the material and making recommendations for new urban design elements in Balcones Heights. Distinctive markers were being considered along with improved directional signage, walkways and thoughtful plantings of shade

As businesses continued to be drawn to strategically located Balcones Heights, workmen early in 1999 finish the Dave & Buster's entertainment complex at Interstate 10 and Loop 410.



trees and landscaping, not only along Fredericksburg Road but throughout Balcones Heights.

The new directions coincided with a milestone event, a gala Balcones Heights Fiftieth Anniversary celebration planned for March 13, 1999. Among those to be recognized were incorporation activists Clyde C. Crews, Ivan Maddox and W. W. Fowlkes. One highlight would be a fiesta and jazz festival on the grounds of Crossroads Mall.

Another event, on the shaded streets in the southern part of the city, would be placement of a historical marker on the old rock city hall, built as a wellhouse in the earliest days of an isolated subdivision to help transform a "wasteland of green mesquite" into the unique community of Balcones Heights.

Based at Balcones Heights city hall are, from left, rear, maintenance men David Castro and Richard Hartman, Building Inspector Howard Gregory, City Secretary Ann Fry; front, Delia Flores, Rhonica Garcia, Yvonne Baez and City Administrator Roy L. Miller.



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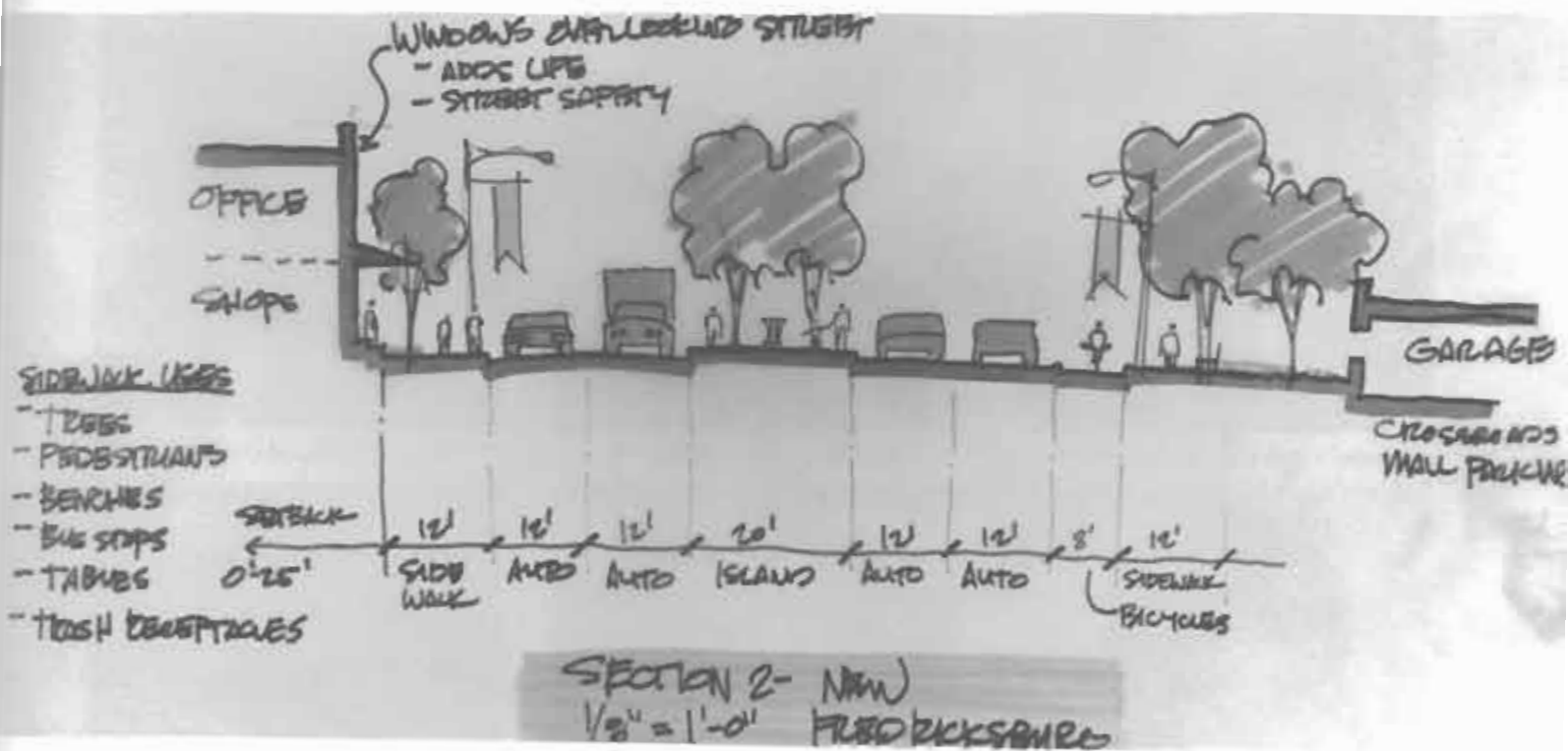
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As Balcones Heights planners took a new look at their city, a seminar led by the San Antonio Chapter of the American Institute of Architects demonstrated how Fredericksburg Road could be upgraded from its longtime appearance, shown with the San Antonio skyline in the distance, by adding landscaping, sidewalks and bicycle lanes.



Clyde C. Crews, Mayor 1949-51



Carl Kiefer, Mayor 1951-54



Franklin S. Gaskins, Mayor 1954-58



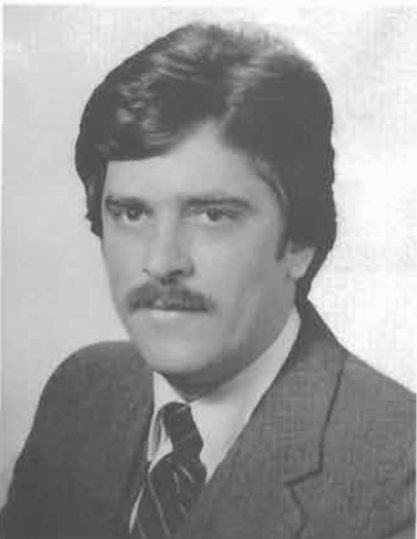
Vernon V. LaBauve, Mayor 1958-60



J. C. Frazier, Mayor 1960-64



Daniel Webster, Mayor 1964-82



Kirk K. Colyer, Mayor 1982-86



Emil E. Deike, Mayor 1986-92



Lucille M. Wohlfarth, 1992-

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# City Councils since 1949

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**1949-51**

Clyde C. Crews, Mayor  
Mrs. Fern Johnston  
Clarence A. Jones  
Carl Kiefer & Clyde Logue  
J. D. Kalafat  
Samuel A. Mershon

**1951-52**

Carl Kiefer, Mayor  
Clyde C. Crews  
Ralph J. Hindelang  
J. D. Kalafat  
E. F. Keathley  
Clyde Logue

**1952-53**

Carl Kiefer, Mayor  
Clyde C. Crews  
Neil Ferry  
Ralph J. Hindelang  
J. D. Kalafat  
Walter Kutschenreuter

**1953-54**

Carl Kiefer, Mayor  
Clyde C. Crews  
Neil Ferry  
Ralph J. Hindelang  
J. D. Kalafat  
Walter Kutschenreuter

**1954-56**

Franklin S. Gaskins, Mayor  
Ray E. Conkle, Van Allen  
Travis Howard  
Henry J. Hannasch  
J. D. Kalafat  
Irene A. Pape

**1956-57**

Franklin S. Gaskins, Mayor  
Henry Hannasch  
Travis Howard  
J. D. Kalafat  
Irene Pape  
Inez Srubar

**1957-58**

Franklin S. Gaskins, Mayor  
Henry Hannasch  
J. D. Kalafat  
Walter Kutschenreuter  
Irene Pape  
Inez Srubar

**1958-60**

Vernon B. LaBauve, Mayor  
Henry Hannasch  
J. D. Kalafat  
Walter Kutschenreuter  
Irene Pape  
Daniel Webster

**1960-62**

J. C. Frazier, Mayor  
Ray Conkle  
J. D. Kalafat  
Porter A. Montgomery  
Gerald Stryker  
Daniel Webster

**1962-64**

J. C. Frazier, Mayor  
Henry Hannasch Jr.  
J. D. Kalafat  
Vernon V. LaBauve  
Joe Murphy  
Daniel Webster

**1964-68**

Daniel Webster, Mayor  
Wallace Beck  
Gene A. Black  
Henry Hannasch Jr.  
J. D. Kalafat  
Vernon V. LaBauve

**1968-74**

Daniel Webster, Mayor  
Gene A. Black  
Randolph E. Boyd  
Vernon V. LaBauve  
John C. Staewen  
Melvin Stowe

**1974-78**

Daniel Webster, Mayor  
Vernon V. LaBauve  
Harold E. Matthies  
Michael R. Pryor  
John C. Staewen  
Lucille M. Wohlfarth

**1978-79**

Daniel Webster, Mayor  
Kirk K. Colyer  
Vernon V. LaBauve  
Michael R. Pryor  
John C. Staewen  
Lucille M. Wohlfarth

**1979-80**

Daniel Webster, Mayor  
Kirk K. Colyer  
Charles E. Cox  
Emil E. Deike  
Vernon V. LaBauve  
Lucille M. Wohlfarth

**1980-82**

Daniel Webster, Mayor  
Kirk K. Colyer  
Charles E. Cox  
Emil E. Deike  
Richard Jimenez  
Vernon V. LaBauve

**1982-83**

Kirk K. Colyer, Mayor  
Emil E. Deike  
Mary L. Evans  
Richard Jimenez  
Vernon V. LaBauve  
Daniel Webster

**1983-84**

Kirk K. Colyer, Mayor  
Emil E. Deike  
Mary Louise Evans  
W. F. (Bill) Hill  
Richard Jimenez  
Daniel Webster





Balcones Heights City Council members in 1998-99, from left, Robert A. Ortega, Clemente Rocha Jr., Mayor Lucille M. Wohlfarth, LaNelle B. Winn, George Moellering and Steve Walker.

#### 1984-86

Kirk K. Colyer, Mayor  
Emil E. Deike  
Mary Louise Evans  
W. F. (Bill) Hill  
Richard Jimenez  
Dixie Lindsey

#### 1986-87

Emil E. Deike, Mayor  
Dominic Criscuolo  
LeMoyne Dorsey  
W. F. (Bill) Hill  
Richard Jimenez  
Cathy Shelton

#### 1987-88

Emil E. Deike, Mayor  
LeMoyne Dorsey  
W. F. (Bill) Hill  
Richard Jimenez  
William L. Johnson  
Cathy Shelton

#### 1988-89

Emil E. Deike, Mayor  
LeMoyne Dorsey  
W. F. (Bill) Hill  
William L. Johnson  
Cathy Shelton  
Lucille M. Wohlfarth

#### 1989-90

Emil E. Deike, Mayor  
Charles Baetz  
LeMoyne Dorsey  
William L. Johnson  
Jesse M. Pacheco  
Lucille M. Wohlfarth

#### 1990-91

Emil E. Deike, Mayor  
LeMoyne Dorsey  
R. C. Gainer  
William L. Johnson  
Jesse M. Pacheco  
Lucille M. Wohlfarth

#### 1991-92

Emil E. Deike, Mayor  
LeMoyne Dorsey  
George Moellering  
William L. Johnson  
Johnny Rodriguez Jr.  
Lucille M. Wohlfarth

#### 1992-93

Lucille M. Wohlfarth, Mayor  
Richard Jimenez  
William L. Johnson  
George Moellering  
Jesse M. Pacheco  
Johnny Rodriguez Jr.

#### 1993-94

Lucille M. Wohlfarth, Mayor  
Richard C. Brooke  
Richard Jimenez  
William L. Johnson  
George Moellering  
Jesse M. Pacheco

#### 1994-97

Lucille M. Wohlfarth, Mayor  
Rusty K. Armstrong  
Richard C. Brooke  
William L. Johnson  
Jesse M. Pacheco  
George Moellering

#### 1997-98

Lucille M. Wohlfarth, Mayor  
George Moellering  
Jesse M. Pacheco  
Clemente Rocha Jr.  
Steve Walker  
LaNelle B. Winn

#### 1998-99

Lucille M. Wohlfarth, Mayor  
George Moellering  
Robert A. Ortega  
Clemente Rocha Jr.  
Steve Walker  
LaNelle B. Winn

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# Notes

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## 1. Homesites in the Hills

1. Darwin Spearing, *Roadside Geology of Texas* (Missoula, MT: Mountain Press Publishing Co., 1991), 63; "Bernardo de Miranda y Flores," *The New Handbook of Texas*, ed. Ron Tyler (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 1996), vol. 4, 769.
2. Steve Tillotson to Lewis F. Fisher, Jan. 12, 1999.
3. Ellen Maury Slayden, *Washington Wife* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 242.
4. John A. Jakle, *The Tourist: Travel in Twentieth-Century North America* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1985), 123–24; "Old Spanish Trail," in *The New Handbook of Texas*, vol. 4, 1072.
5. "OST Motorcade Delayed by Bad Roads Arrives in City," *San Antonio Express*, Mar. 29, 1929, 11; "OST Motorcade Arrives Monday," *Express*, Oct. 9, 1929, 7-B.
6. "Jefferson Manor Said a Success," *Express*, Mar. 13, 1932, 1-C.
7. "At Last It Has Been Made Possible," *Express*, Mar. 27, 1932, 2-C.
8. Ibid.
9. "Balcones Heights Sale Under Way," *Express*, Mar. 27, 1932, 1-C.
10. "72 Lots Sold in Balcones Heights," *Express*, Apr. 3, 1932, 1-C; "Balcones Heights," *Express*, May 1, 1932, 4-C.
11. "Balcones Heights Sale Under Way," *Express*, Mar. 27, 1932, 1-C.
12. "Balcones Heights," *Express*, May 1, 1932, 4-C; "Jefferson Manor," *Express*, May 8, 1932, 3-C; Mary McMillan Fisher, "San Antonio—The Hoover Era," in *Texas Cities and the Great Depression*, ed. Robert Cotner (Austin: The Texas Memorial Museum, 1973), 56–60.
13. Fisher, "San Antonio—The Hoover Era," 56–60.
14. "Notes and Comments On Local Real Estate," *Express*, Jun. 20, 1943, 10-C.

## 2. The Incorporation 'War' with San Antonio

1. Jack Long to Lewis F. Fisher, Jan. 4, 1999. The arena was a partnership between Cotulla rancher and South Texas rodeo producer Dudley Storey and T. Brooks Wood, a professional announcer and radio equipment dealer who had inherited the site. Its rodeo was approved by the national Rodeo-Cowboy Association, according to Long, a local rodeo historian who also performed there. It stood past the western end of present-day Storeywood Street north of Dellview Elementary School.

2. Clyde C. Crews to Lewis F. Fisher, Jan. 4, 1999.
3. "Balconians All Set for Long War With San Antonio," *San Antonio Light*, Nov. 19, 1948, 1.
4. Arnold Fleischmann, "Sunbelt Boosterism: The Politics of Postwar Growth and Annexation in San Antonio" in *The Rise of Sunbelt Cities*, eds. David C. Perry and Arthur T. Watkins (Beverly Hills CA: Sage Publications, 1977), 155.
5. Char Miller and Heywood T. Sanders, *Urban Texas: Politics and Development* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1990), 114.
6. John A. Booth and David R. Johnson, in *The Politics of San Antonio*, eds. David R. Johnson, John A. Booth and Richard J. Harris (Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 21; "Annexation Battle Before High Court," *Express*, Dec. 15, 1948, 1.
7. "Newest San Antonio Suburb Set to Name City Officials," *Express*, Nov. 15, 1948, B-1; Ivan Maddox to Lewis F. Fisher, Jan. 12, 1999.
8. Crews to Fisher, Jan. 4, 1999.
9. Assisting Mershon as presiding judge were Velma and Jack Casper, clerks. The election committee was chaired by Clyde Crews and included Mershon, Ivan G. Maddox and Carl Kiefer. The group hired W. W. Fowlkes as its attorney.
10. "Balconians All Set for Long War," *Light*, Nov. 19, 1948.
11. "City To Deny Service To North Side Suburb," *Express*, Nov. 16, 1948, 1; "Balcones Hts. Action Set," *Light*, Nov. 17, 1948, 1-C.
12. "S.A. Declares War on New Suburb," *Express*, Nov. 18, 1948, 1; "Council Refuses Newest City Utility Service," *Express*, Nov. 19, 1948, 12; "Balcones Utilities Pondered," *Express*, Nov. 21, 1948, 1-A; "Public Service Board Keeps ban on Balcones," *Express*, Dec. 5, 1948, 1-A.
13. "Balconians All Set for Long War With San Antonio," *Light*, Nov. 19, 1948, 1.
14. Minutes, City of Balcones Heights, Apr. 18, Apr. 25, May 9, 1949. A new board of adjustment was chaired by Earl Gillette and included Jack Harding, Fern Johnston, E.F. Keathley and J. C. Brumbaugh.
15. "Balcones Heights Full-Fledged City With Court and Policemen," *San Antonio News*, Jun. 23, 1949, 1-B; Minutes, Jan. 16, 1950.
16. Dixie Lindsey to Lewis F. Fisher, Dec. 2, 1998. Still active in 1999 in management of Siesta Courts, since renamed Siesta Motel, is its original manager, Marie Martin, first secretary of the San Antonio Motor Court Association—now the San Antonio Hotel-Motel Association—when it was organized in 1949.

17. "Money Woes Fret Suburb," *Light*, Jan. 1, 1950, 1-A.
18. "Ordinance No. 8, Work On Public Streets," Oct. 14, 1949.
19. Minutes, Aug. 13, 1951; W. W. Fowlkes to Lewis F. Fisher, Dec. 15, 1998.
20. Johnson, Booth and Harris, *The Politics of San Antonio*, 21-22; Minutes, Oct. 13, 1952.
21. "Balcones Hts. Annexation Balked," *Light*, Feb. 3, 1953, 4; Crews to Fisher, Jan. 4, 1999.
22. Minutes, Feb. 2, 1953; "Annexation Balked," *Light*, Feb. 3, 1953.
23. Minutes, Feb. 9, 1953.

### 3. Hard Times in a Tax-Free City

1. "Balcones Hts. Campaign On," *Light*, Mar. 29, 1956, 6; "Balcones Returns Incumbents," *Light*, Apr., 1956.
2. Minutes, Jul. 22, Oct. 14, 1953; Jan. 14, 1957.
3. Minutes, Apr. 13, 1953; Jun. 10, 1957; Renee Hermanson, *Hope Lutheran Church History* (San Antonio: 1982), 8.
4. Minutes, May 9, 1955; Aug. 12, 1957; "Balcones Mayor In Tussle," *Light*, May 14, 1955, 1; "Balcones Mayor To Be Charged," *Express-News*, May 15, 1955; "Court Clears Gaskin Of Assault," *Express*, Aug. 26, 1955.
5. Minutes, Sept. 21, 1954; "Balcones Hgts. Starts Own Firefighters," *Light*, Nov. 11, 1954, 3; "Balcones Forms Fire Department," *Express*, n.d.
6. *Ibid.*; Minutes, Jan. 14, 1957; "Balcones Heights Gets Fire Truck," *Express*, n.d.
7. "Top of the News," *Express-News*, May 1, 1955, 1.
8. Minutes, May 9, 1955; "Balcones Police Force Defended," *Express*, May 10, 1955, 1; "Balcones Heights Leaders Win Council Vote of Confidence," *Light*, May 10, 1955; "Citizens in Uproar Back Balcones Rule," *News*, May 10, 1955, 1-A. "The trouble is, we have no taxes," Gaskins explained. "Whenever a town operates without taxes, the suspicion of it being a speed trap comes down on it." What is a speed trap? The mayor's response: "A speed trap is an unmarked road."
9. "Wasp's Nest," *Alamo Heights News*, May 12, 1955, 12.
10. "Intersection Lights Are Installed," *Light*, Feb. 26, 1957, 10.
11. "Court Passes Speeding Case," *Light*, May 15, 1955.
12. Minutes, Sept. 8, 1958; "Speeds Clocked," *Light*, Oct. 26, 1958, 8-A.
13. J. C. Frazier, Dec. 30, 1960, memo in city files.
14. Minutes, Oct. 13, 1958-Aug. 10, 1959.
15. Minutes, Jul. 9, 1962.
16. "Intersection Lights Are Installed," *Light*, Feb. 26, 1957, 10.
17. Minutes, Nov. 10, 1958; Jun. 8, 1959.
18. "Won't Somebody Fill The Holes on Poor Dewhurst?," *News*, Nov. 2, 1955, 10-D; "Citizens Say Ills Due to Caliche Dust," *Light*, Jan. 10, 1956; "Dellview Up in Arms About Dust," *News*, Jan. 10, 1956, 1-D.
19. "Dewhurst Rd. Riders Get New Jolt," *Express*, n.d.; Minutes, Dec. 12, 1966; Apr. 3, 1967.
20. Minutes, Jul. 5, 1950; Nov. 10, 1951; Jul. 19, 1954; Mar. 9, 1964.

21. Agreement With H.B. Zachry Properties, Jun. 28, 1950.
22. "Expressway Extension Seen as Business Aid," *Express*, Jun. 3, 1954, 1-C; Minutes, Jun. 14, 1954; Lewis F. Fisher, *Saving San Antonio: The Precarious Preservation of a Heritage* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 1996), 284-86.
23. Minutes, May 14, 1956.

### 4. The World Rushes In

1. Minutes, Mar. 20, May 8, Jul. 10, 1961; Apr. 9, 1962.
2. Jack Nicholson to Lewis F. Fisher, Jan. 6, 1999.
3. "Of Course! An Alice At Wonderland," *Express*, Sept. 14, 1961, 1-E; "Three-Day Sale Launched," *Express*, Sept. 15, 1964, 12-A.
4. "Cinemoppet Theater For Tots," *Express*, Sept. 14, 1961, 1-E.
5. "Little SA Suburb Pushes Big Plans," *News*, Nov. 26, 1964, 11-H; Jack Nicholson to Lewis F. Fisher, Jan. 5, 1999.
6. Minutes, Jul. 9, 1962; Jan. 14, 1963. In 1964, the press noted "leniency toward motorists going just slightly over the speed limits" and quoted Police Chief Bob Pryor as saying, "We haven't used radar since God knows when." New Mayor Daniel Webster was reported as hastening to add, "Our officers are alert." ("Little SA Suburb," *News*, Nov. 26, 1964, 11-H.)
7. Minutes, Sept. 10, 18, 1962; Apr. 8, Apr. 22, 1963.
8. Minutes, Jan. 11, 1960.
9. Minutes, Apr. 8, 1963; Sept. 9, 30, 1963; Apr. 28, 1964; May 6, 11, 1964.
10. Minutes, Dec. 27, 1967.
11. "Retail sales tax proves windfall to Balcones H.," *News*, Nov. 6, 1970, 8-A; "Balcones Heights is top tax earner," *News*, Mar. 3, 1975.
12. "Retail sales tax," *News*, Nov. 6, 1970.
13. Minutes, Jul. 8, 1963; Jul. 14, Oct. 13, 1969; "Balcones Voters Reject New Name," *Express*, Dec. 8, 1969.
14. Minutes, Sept. 8, 1969; "Paul Thompson," *News*, Dec. 5, 1969, 1.
15. "Retail sales tax," *News*, Nov. 6, 1970.

### 5. New Realities

1. Minutes, Apr. 3, 1972.
2. Minutes, Sept. 9, 1974; "Little City Hall To Get New Life," *Express-News*, May 15, 1983, 2-E.
3. "High crime rate not all bad—Balcones Heights," *News*, Jan., 1981.
4. "Restaurant manager slain in Balcones Heights robbery," *Express-News*, May 23, 1983, 1-A; "Balcones Heights joins crime battle," *Express*, Sept. 2, 1983, 5-A.
5. "Balcones Heights policeman shoots down robbery suspect," *Express*, Nov. 17, 1984, 1-D; "Officers honor slain colleague," *Express-News*, Mar. 16, 1989; "Shooting suspect charged," *Express-News*, Mar. 23, 1989, 1-A.
6. "Citizens demand park be reopened," *Express-News*, Sept. 13, 1984, 7-F; "Opening the new recreation park," *Express-News*, Mar. 4, 1985, 4-A.

7. "Balcones ranks fourth in crime," *Jefferson Area Recorder Times*, Aug. 3, 1989, 1.
8. "Parade slated in Balcones Heights," *The Herald*, Nov. 9, 1977; "Balcones Heights gala starts Saturday," *Express*, May 13, 1983, 20-A; "New chamber of commerce holds first annual banquet," *Jefferson Area Recorder-Times*, Mar. 8, 1984, 1.
9. "Balcones Heights sales tax lag no cause for alarm," *Light*, Nov. 29, 1982, 3-A.
10. "Balcones Heights hikes taxes, fires dispatchers," *Express-News*, Sept. 10, 1986.
11. "Balcones Heights voters OK tax rollback," *Express*, Jan. 22, 1989; "BH tax rollback in action," *Jefferson Area Recorder-Times*, Feb. 23, 1989, 1; "BH taxes may go up," *Jefferson Area Recorder Times*, Jun. 29, 1989, 1; "Tax hike on BH agenda," *Jefferson Area Recorder-Times*, Sept. 7, 1989.
12. "Wonderland is sold," *Express*, Jul. 6, 1977, 1-A; "Multi-million-dollar facelift for malls," *Express-News*, Oct. 26, 1980, 1-H.
13. "Multi-million-dollar facelift," *Express-News*, Oct. 26, 1980, 1-H; "Mall reopening celebrated," *Light*, Jun. 15, 1981.
14. "CrossRoads project has funds," *Express-News*, May 8, 1985, 1-D.
15. "Crossroads mall bows in with grand opening today," *Express-News*, Nov. 14, 1987, 1-G.
16. "Crossroads Mall changes image to draw tenants," *San Antonio Business Journal*, Sept. 4, 1989, 1. The research firm doing the in-depth report for the mall owners was the Indianapolis-based Stillerman, Jones and Company.
17. "Crossroads bids to create niche," *Express-News*, Aug. 16, 1990, 1-H.

---

# Index

---

Alamo Heights, City of, 8  
*Alamo* movie party, 26-27  
Alta Vista Apartments, 47  
American Institute of Architects, 47, 49  
Andricks, Reynolds, 9

Balcones Escarpment, 1  
Balcones Heights, City of, anniversaries, 35, 48; apartments, 17, 30, 45, 46-47; bond issues, 30, 31, 40; budget, 20, 32, 35, 36, 38-40; city hall, 7, 11, 13, 20, 27, 33, 35, 48; de-annexations, 21, 22; demographics, 9, 11, 17, 30, 33, 35-36, 39, 45-47; "Gateway to Mexico," 20, 22; incorporation, 7-15; long-range planning, 47-49; Municipal Court, 17, 19-21, 33, 45; name change to Wonderland, 27, 32-33; parks, 11, 37; sales tax revenue, 31-32, 35, 38-39, 45; street repairs, 12, 21-22, 30, 35; taxation, 15, 17, 20, 27, 30, 38-40; traffic enforcement, 16-17, 19-21; urbanization, 35, 46; utilities, 8-9, 10, 12-15, 18, 31, 32; water systems, 7, 9, 11, 14-15, 18, 31; zoning, 7, 10

Balcones Heights Community Service Center, 35-36

Balcones Heights Company, 2-5

Balcones Heights Fire Department, 18-19, 27, 32, 35-36, 45; Auxiliary, 30, 31

Balcones Heights Police Department, 19-20, 33, 35-38, 39, 45, 46

Balcones Heights Water Company, 9, 11, 15

Beck, Wallace, 32

Becker, A. L., 24, 28-29

Black, George, 32

Bonanza, 30

Brumbaugh, J. C., 53

Burlington Coat Factory, 41

Callaghan, Alfred, 10

Caran, John, 19

Casper, Jack, 9-10, 19, 54

Casper, Velma, 54

Central Park Mall, 40

City Public Service Board, 10, 31

City Water Board, 12, 14

Colyer, Kirk, 37, 38

Comanche Indians, 1

Community Realty Company, 24, 40

Conkle, Gertrude, 30, 31

Country Gentleman Estates, 5, 7, 8, 9; water system, 9, 14, 18, 31

Crews, Clyde C., 6, 7, 9, 10, 13, 48, 53

Crossroads of San Antonio mall, 35, 38, 40-42, 45, 48, 55; *See also* Wonderland Shopping City

Dave & Buster's, 48

de la Garza, Robert, 46

Deike, Emil, 38, 39

Delavan, George, 14

Dellview subdivision, 12, 14, 18, 21, 45

Denny's, 30

Depression, 5

Dewhurst Road, 14, 17, 21-22, 24

Donagan, Carl, 21

Eckerd Drugs, 41

Evans, Mary Louise, 37

Ferry, Neil, 14

First Unitarian-Universalist Church, 18, 41

Flood, L. H., 28-29

Fort Sam Houston, 1

Fowlkes, W. W., 14, 48, 53

Frazier, J. C., 20, 28, 30

Fredericksburg Road, early use, 1-3; transition, 6, 7, 20, 21, 23, 30; plans for, 45, 47, 49

Frost Bros., 38, 40, 41

Fry, Ann, 46, 47

Fuchs, Steve, 37

Gaskins, Franklin S., 17, 18, 19-20, 21, 23, 54

Gentleman Drive, 30

Gill Road, 25, 28

Gillette, Earl, 53

Grady's Bar-B-Q, 9

Greater S.A. Safety Council, 21

Green Pastures Restaurant, 6, 7, 11, 17

Handy Andy, 24, 27, 28, 41

Hannasch, Henry, 9, 14, 17

Hannasch, Henry Jr., 32

Harding, Jack, 53

Harrell, Charles A., 13

Hart, I. J., 2

Head, J. G., 3, 5

Hillcrest Road, 1, 6, 8, 21

Hillside Tourist Court and Mobile

Home Park, 9, 14, 17

Hindelang, Ralph, 13

Hodges, Pamela, 47

Holdman, Michael J., 17

Hope Lutheran Church, 18

Indian Village Restaurant, 11, 12, 18, 28, 30

Ingram Park Mall, 40

Interstates 10 and 410, 22-25, 27, 28-29, 45

Jefferson High School, 2-5

Jefferson Manor, 2, 5

Jim's Coffee Shop, 30

Johnson, Bruce, 33

Johnston, Fern, 53

Jones, Clarence A., 17

Jorrie's Furniture, 30

Kalafat, J.D., 14, 32

Keathley, E.E., 53

Kiefer, Carl, 9, 12-13, 53

LaBauve, Vernon, 21, 30, 32

Lack's Furniture, 30

Lehndorff Group, 40

Leon Springs Military Reservation, 1

Liberty House, 40

Light House Courts, 9, 23

Lindsey, R. L., 11

Luby's Cafeteria, 30

Maddox, Ivan G., 9, 48, 53

Martin, Marie, 53

Matthies, Charles W., 46

Mauerman, Gus, 8

- Maverick, Albert, 1  
 McAllister, Walter W., 13  
 Menn, Kenneth R., 36–37, 46  
 Mershon, Samuel A., 9, 54  
 Miller, Roy L., 46, 47  
 Miranda y Flores, Bernardo de, 1  
 Modern Development Company, 2  
 Montgomery Ward, 28, 29, 41  
 MRO Properties, 42
- Newman, Elmer C., 33  
 Nicholson, Jack, 29, 30  
 North Point Plaza, 30  
 North Star Mall, 40  
 Novak, Cillie, Park, 11, 37  
 Novak, John, 9, 11
- Old Spanish Trail Highway, 2  
 Olmos Park, City of, 8, 9, 10, 23
- Page's Service Station, 10  
 Pape's Food Store, 11  
 Pleasant Drive, 21  
 Pryor, Robert C. Jr., 17, 19, 20, 46, 54
- Rahm, Emmett J., 20  
 Rhodes Department Store, 30, 40
- Rogiers, Richard Scott, 37  
 Rogiers, Richard Scott, Park, 37
- St. Gregory the Great Catholic Church, 17, 41  
 San Antonio, City of, annexation policies, 7–9; growth, 2, 8–9, 22–23, 45; relationship with Balcones Heights, 7–8, 12–14  
 Schaefer's Garage, 19  
 Senior Citizens Organization, 36  
 Siesta Motor Court, 11, 22, 28, 53  
 Simpson, Willard E., 31  
 Smith, Charles T., 31  
 Southern Pacific Railroad, 1, 22  
 Southwest Texas State University, 47  
 Stateson, Joe, 32  
 Stein Mart, 41  
 Stevens, John J., 7  
 Storey-Wood Arena, 7, 9, 14, 17, 53  
 Sumner Suites, 42  
 Sunshine Ranch, 1
- Tandy, Charles, 30  
 Terrell Hills, City of, 8, 9, 10  
 Terrell Wells, 9  
 Thompson, Paul, 19, 33
- Tillotson, Steve, 47  
 TransGuide, 42–43
- University of Texas at San Antonio, 47  
 Ursuline Academy, 3
- VIA Transit, 37, 40  
 Vivian Lane, 24
- Wayne, John, 26–27  
 Webster, Daniel, 30, 32, 35, 38, 46, 54  
 Western Auto, 30  
 Wick, Frank W., 5, 7  
 Winn's, 41  
 Wohlfarth, Lucille, 30, 31, 46  
 Woldhagen's Builder's Supply, 10  
 Wonder Plaza, 30  
 Wonder Theater, 30, 41  
 Wonderland Shopping City, 27–30, 32, 33, 35, 37, 38, 40–41; *See also* Crossroads of San Antonio mall  
 Woodlawn Hills, 2  
 Woolco Department Store, 30  
 World War II, 5
- Zachry, H.B., Properties, 22





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John Wayne cuts the Battle of the Alamo cake at a Balcones Heights supermarket at the time of *The Alamo* movie's world premiere.



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Balcones Heights Police Chief Bob Pryor with his notorious "Speed Watch."

**B**alcones Heights, Texas is unique among San

Antonio's suburban cities. Its wooded homesites were promoted during the Depression as affordable for families "of moderate means." Its residents incorporated in 1948 to gain zoning protection only to find themselves having to rely on revenue from traffic offenders to run the city.

Then two new interstate highways intersected at Balcones Heights, making it a major crossroads. A regional shopping mall and other businesses soon filled half the city's territory, bringing sales tax revenues that funded a host of municipal services.

Having marked its first half century, Balcones Heights now deals with issues of urban renewal and long-range planning to enhance its strategic setting midway between downtown San Antonio and fast-growing affluent suburban areas to the northwest.

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